CONCEPTUALIZING JUSTICE WITH FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

by

RACHEL RANSCHAERT

(Under the Direction of Hilary Hughes)

ABSTRACT

In recent years the debate over the role of justice-work in schools has grown increasingly tumultuous. Complicating this question even more is the lack of consensus about what the term justice means. In both educational research and popular culture, multiple conceptualizations of justice circulate simultaneously, sometimes standing in contradiction to one another. The purpose of this dissertation is to disrupt the current research on justice-oriented teacher education by exploring how newly inducted teachers who are immersed in political, ideological, and social discourses respond to various conceptions of justice they encounter. I conducted interviews using elicitation vignettes as well as monthly focus groups with a group of six first-year teachers who graduated from the same justice-oriented teacher education program. These conversations took place over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, a period that encompassed the COVID-19 pandemic, the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, the 2020 Presidential election, and numerous other events. In my analysis I draw on poststructural conceptions of discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1978) to trace how discursive forces of language and power emanating from teacher education programs, school and district policies, and news and social media function in ways that enable and constrain how participants

conceptualize justice in their first year of teaching. My findings suggest that the participants do not conceptualize justice in a single clear way. Instead, their talk about justice is laden with both contradictions and connections to both established theories of justice and current events. Further, while the participants seem to suggest that they aspire to enact justice-oriented teaching in particular ways, they describe powerful discourses of community backlash and the primacy of curricular pacing as limiting what seems possible in their current settings. In concluding, I explore the ways that these findings stand to complicate justice-oriented teacher education. I suggest a need to view teacher education not as an intervention that can drastically alter the practices of teachers, but rather as one discourse among many that are acting upon teachers as they seek to make sense of what justice-oriented teaching looks like in their context.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher education; First year teachers; Justice; Discourse analysis; Foucault; Bakhtin

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DEDICATION

For Rose and your sister-to-come with love, joy, and hope.

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I remember reading the book *Eat, Pray, Love* (Gilbert, 2006) while sitting in my loft bed in a dorm room at Notre Dame. I don't remember much about the book Truthfully, I don't remember what eating or praying or loving the narrator did. However, as I've worked through my Ph.D., and this dissertation in particular, one passage of the book, one that has stayed with me all these years, continued to come to mind:

> In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices. (Gilbert, 2006)

As I think back on the process of writing this dissertation and the absolute privilege it has been to do this work, I am overwhelmed by the support, generosity, and love I have felt throughout this process. I know these are kindnesses I could never pay back. So instead, I offer these acknowledgments as a feeble and incomplete attempt at encompassing my gratitude. Thank you. Forever and sincerely.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

> *Words. Words. I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want. Perhaps better with music? But music attacks my inner ear like an antagonist, it's not my world. The fact is, the real experience can't be described. I think, bitterly, that a row of asterisks, like an old-fashioned novel, might be better. Or a symbol of some kind, a circle perhaps, or a square. Anything at all, but not words. The people who have been there, in the place in themselves where words, patterns, order, dissolve, will know what I mean and others won't. But once having been there, there's a terrible irony, a terrible shrug of the shoulders, and it's not a question of fighting it, or disowning it, or of right or wrong, but simply knowing it is there, always. It's a question of bowing to it, so to speak, with a kind of courtesy, as to an ancient enemy: All right, I know you are there, but we have to preserve the forms, don't we? And perhaps the condition of your existing at all is precisely that we preserve the forms, create the patterns - have you thought of that? (Lessing, 2008, p. 604)*

I have begun this dissertation so many times. In my earliest thinking, I cited the aftermath of the 2016 election, the rise of hate incidents, and gun violence both in and outside of schools. A shooting at an El Paso Wal-Mart, at a New Zealand mosque. When I first drafted the proposal, I opened with stories about the inequities exacerbated by the

COVID-19 pandemic. Then I began with the ways legacies of racism garnered national outrage with the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others. As I was gathering data, I drafted beginnings connecting my research questions to conversations about the 2020 US Presidential election, the insurrection at the Capitol, the birth of my child. Then, through the summer, I drafted paragraphs relating to the nationwide outrage around the idea of Critical Race Theory in schools. Through the fall I wrote about Texas school leaders who suggested both sides of the Holocaust be taught and launched an investigation into books about racism and LGBTQ+ characters that appeared in classroom and school libraries. More and more ways into this work, into this point in time, each one insufficient on its own. And perhaps that is the point. Considering the work of teachers in the present moment cannot occur as distillation – singling out particular moments or events and pondering their effects on educators – because educators do not experience these events in a vacuum. Instead, it must be considered all at once, a complex web of experiences with no narrative and little cohesion. How does one write the beginning of *that?*

My way into writing has always been to approach my bookshelf, my "foundational texts" that have made the cut over the course of eight moves in ten years[1]. Most often, these are postmodern pieces or contemporary U.S. novels – the books that taught me to think outside of tropes and forms, the books that began to resemble the

[1] This way of thinking aligns with the theoretical and methodological stance I take throughout this dissertation. The ideas of these texts are among the discourses which make up my utterances, my analysis. My research, ideas, and ways of conceptualizing the world are only possible because of the particular texts, ideas, and language that coalesced around me at particular moments in time. Throughout this dissertation, I will invoke numerous texts and events surrounding texts that are entirely unrelated to educational research as a means of theorizing the work.

chaos of the world in a way that Freytag's pyramid[2] never could. To write, then, I first select a book, look back at the passages I have marked over the years, and begin to think. When I consider the sense of overwhelm, the inundation of contextualizing stories that could serve as a way into this dissertation, I come to Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*[3]. The book is centered around the protagonist, Anna Wulf, who fastidiously recounts her life in four separate notebooks: the black notebook which chronicles her time spent in Rhodesia, the red notebook which traces her experiences in the Communist party, the yellow notebook, a novel relating to the breakdown of her romantic relationship, and the blue notebook, detailing her emotional life. Midway through the novel, Anna suffers a breakdown, motivated in part by her inability to neatly organize her life into these distinct spaces. She then crafts her Golden Notebook, a place where she captures all of the parts of her life, even if it is disorganized, messy, and defies narrative conventions.

At many points during the writing of this dissertation, I likened myself to Anna Wulf. In the passage that opens this chapter, she discussed the way that words seem completely inadequate to communicate the complexity of her world, she proposed

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[2] Freytag's pyramid is a device of literary analysis that is also often referred to as the "plot diagram" or "plot pyramid." Its prominence has been cemented across the United States by English Language Arts textbooks and learning standards. Typically, the plot pyramid is composed of set parts: the introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. Many late modernist and postmodernist authors (the ones who I call upon throughout this dissertation) rejected traditional narrative and literary forms in their work, instead seeking to capture something more dynamic, more messy, and more attuned to their realities of living. As a former English Language Arts teacher, I taught Freytag's Pyramid. I supervised the repetitive diagramming of short stories and novels into their constituent parts. It is work I did not enjoy. I consider the writing of this dissertation as a part of my absolution.

[3] I recognize that there have been numerous critiques of *The Golden Notebook.* Elements of the text's treatment of race, gender, and colonialism are problematic. However, as this is not a dissertation focused on literary criticism, I will not outline these here. Instead, I invoke Lessing's text because of the brilliant way it illustrates the breakdown of form.

another media, but then found herself stuck, committed to this flawed medium of language. She insisted, then, that if we are to attempt to communicate about the world using words, we must always be aware of their insufficiency, bowing to them, she said, *"*like an ancient enemy*,"* even if we are relegated to continue "preserving forms" and "creating patterns" (p. 123) that will never *quite* capture all we are trying to say. The concept of the dissertation, in addition to being bound up in the always-not-quite medium of words, is also bound up in particular conventions. The dissertation is to have five chapters that present particular information at particular points building, like Freytag's pyramid, to a climactic statement of findings that contribute to the field in fabulous, clear, and novel ways. As I wrote and attempted to negotiate my project into this form, I felt like Anna Wulf. Reducing the project to those five formulaic chapters forced the work into a narrative that was not consistent with the argument I was trying to make. So in some ways, I, too, have rejected traditional forms. This dissertation will include all of the typical components: literature review, theoretical framing, methodology, data, and discussion, but the chapters have taken somewhat different shapes. My hope is that you, as the reader, will leave this dissertation with a sense of the messiness and complicatedness that shaped the participants' responses, rather than with a neat set of takeaways.

Education and the Preservation of Forms

So often, conversations about teaching and learning in both educational research and the broader culture are situated in deeply entrenched forms. There is an assumption that teaching and learning is a linear, developmental process. Standardized tests are designed such that a teacher can trace a student's incorrect answer on a particular

question back to a particular lesson in an attempt to diagnose what went wrong (Apple, 2001). The assumption of the linear transfer of knowledge is so entrenched that when something goes wrong, it is presumed that somewhere along the line an individual failed, for the system could not conceivably be at fault (Kumashiro, 2012). What I suggest in this dissertation is that it is imperative that we look more broadly at the multitude of forces that are acting upon teachers and learners to understand that learning (of any kind) is not a process of direct transfer, but rather a negotiation of discourses.

In this dissertation project, I set out with the questions: *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of justice operating in schools? What discourses do they call upon in responding?* To consider these questions, I worked with first year teachers who recently graduated from a justice-oriented teacher education program over the course of their first year teaching, the 2020-2021 academic year. Early in the year, the participants engaged in elicitation vignette interviews which asked them to comment on different ways fictional teachers worked to enact justice-oriented practices in their classrooms. Then, each month throughout the academic year, the participants took part in Zoom focus group conversations to discuss where they saw issues of justice arising in their schools and how they were (or were not) attending to those issues.

The 2020-2021 academic year was a particularly tumultuous one: educators the world over were reckoning with how to make schooling happen amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternative class schedules were developed, masks were worn, hybrid options were offered; many remained home and many others attended school, maskless, as though no pandemic was happening. Beyond the pandemic, many in the United States

were reckoning with legacies of racialized violence and oppression that became highly publicized following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, among others. Simultaneously, the 2020 presidential election between incumbent Donald Trump and Joe Biden loomed large, with many from both parties alleging that the nature and future of democracy in the United States was at stake. This anxiety came to a peak on January 6, 2021 when violent insurrectionists broke into the U.S. Capitol, seeking to do harm to members of Congress and impede the certification of Joe Biden's victory. Beyond these major events were innumerable community happenings and conflicts that colored the participants' first years with tension, conflict, and uncertainty. In my analysis of the interview and focus group data, I employed poststructural discourse analysis to consider how discourses stemming from media, politics, school leaders, and other powers may surface in participants' talk about justice. Further, I considered how these discourses may function to enable and constrain the choices the participants make surrounding justice-oriented practices in their classrooms.

In this dissertation, I propose that a different set of questions should be asked in teacher education, not about interventions and linear development, not about who is the 'right' candidate to be a justice-oriented educator. Instead, we need to ask about how we are acknowledging teachers as complex individuals who have spent a lifetime being subjected by multiple competing discourses and also how we are preparing teachers to respond to the onslaught of logics and narratives they will encounter as working teachers, many of which directly contradict the ideas they may have been taught in their justice-oriented teacher education program.

In some ways, I hope this project reads like a Golden Notebook, a capturing of the messiness of being a teacher in a particular place in a particular moment. This task is valuable, not because I anticipate a replication of the conditions of this place and moment elsewhere, but because it can illustrate the innumerable forces, pressures, and discourses continuously acting on all teachers, in all places, in all moments. The nature of this complexity has important implications for teacher educators and for those supporting induction teachers in schools. It asks us to stop looking only at our pedagogies and the supports we provide for teachers, to stop assuming that our work is the loudest or most important messaging about teaching that our students hear. Instead, what becomes clear from tracing the complex discourses in which teachers are always, already immersed is that teacher educators must recognize, engage, and respond to the discursive tensions around justice in the current moment *with* teachers, enabling them to recognize the ways that different ideas are working on them and in their schools. We must stop telling teachers to "close the door and teach" and instead respond thoughtfully to the understandable uncertainty that arises from hearing directly contradictory messaging from a teacher education program and competing voices like news media, school administrators, and others. In this opening chapter, I will begin by situating the need for justice-oriented[4] teaching in schools in the current moment.

Situating the Study in The Current Moment

It is important to begin by stating that there has never been a time where all children have had access to fully just, equal public schooling in the United States. For

[4] Traditionally, the first chapter of a dissertation also includes a definition of terms. The most central term to this dissertation is *justice.* However, the difficulty in defining justice is part of my argument in this dissertation. Thus, Chapter Two is dedicated to exploring this term.

this reason, conversations about justice and equity are *always* urgent and important. However, the particular socio-political climate of the current moment[5] makes this need even more urgent. Carter Andrews, Richmond, and Stroupe (2017), for example, described the ways in which the 2016 United States presidential campaign "brought rhetoric that perpetuated racism, sexism, misogyny, xenophobia, religious discrimination, homophobia, and ableism, and the aftermath permeates every formal institution in the nation" (p. 121). This is not to say that this rhetoric was absent in the time before the 2016 campaign, but rather to emphasize that period as a turning point in which particular discourses which may have been lodged in concentrated pockets, or harbored quietly, returned and were made thinkable in large-scale, public arenas. The Southern Poverty Law Center found more than 1,100 hate crimes or acts of violence toward historically marginalized groups in schools in the weeks immediately following the 2016 election (Costello, 2016). In the years since, violent White supremacists have taken to crediting Donald Trump in manifestos relating to the slaughter of those who are different than them in massacres like those that took place in New Zealand and El Paso in 2019 (Arango et al., 2019; Graham-McLay, 2019). Since then, studies have found that political polarization is at one of the highest levels it has ever been and has manifested not only in political gridlock in government, but also in hostile interactions between individuals (Dimock & Wike, 2020). School board meetings, which were frequently characterized as somewhat dull, bureaucratic events, suddenly became sites of hostility and violence as community members protested against mask mandates in schools (Barbaro, 2021). In the

[5] Data collection for this project began in Fall 2020 and analysis and writing were completed in Spring 2022

midst of all of this, teachers were tasked to maintain normalcy and continue their work as usual.

At the same time, the debate over the role of justice-work in schools has grown increasingly tumultuous in recent years, from President Trump's moves to eliminate culturally responsive pedagogies (Fuchs, 2020) to state-level initiatives to silence all conversations relating to systemic inequities and justice in classrooms (Dutton, 2021) to violent protests and outbursts at school board meetings across the country against the idea of Critical Race Theory in schools (Dorman, 2021). Such messaging reinforces the idea that teachers are meant to remain politically neutral in the classroom[6] and that addressing injustices they see in the world is problematic and (often) punishable. Simultaneously, teacher leaders, activists, and scholars work tirelessly to advocate for justice-work to happen in schools and they create and share curriculum resources that address urgent issues of oppression, marginalization, and injustice such as the murder of George Floyd (Will & Schwartz, 2020) and the insurrection at the capitol (Bradley, 2021). Teachers, then, are positioned among these competing discourses around the role of justice in the classroom.

Complicating the role of justice-work in schools even more is the lack of consensus about what the term *justice* means. In popular culture and academic spaces, the term remains a "malleable expression that encompasses multiple meanings" (Shapira-Lichinsky, 2016, p. 47). For instance, some write about justice as an issue of recognition, meaning the most important way to pursue justice is to recognize cultural difference;

[6] A problematic idea which I will further interrogate in Chapter Eight

while others assert that justice is rooted in redistribution, insisting that the pursuit of justice requires a restructuring of systems of power (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; North, 2006; Wang, 2013).

Thus, as more and more teacher education programs continue to advertise themselves as social justice oriented (Zeichner, 2006), "it is possible for institutions with differing perspectives, political agendas, and strategies to lay claim to the same vision of teacher preparation" (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009, p. 595), often without defining what they mean. In other words, different teacher education programs, all described as justice-oriented, may be teaching their teacher candidates distinct, and even contradictory, ideas about justice. As a result, when graduates from these programs enter schools, they may bring with them competing conceptions of justice. In Chapter Two, I will trace the foundations and implications of these varied conceptions of justice. However, as a way to contextualize the project, I will offer some examples here. One such contradiction emerges when considering how popular narratives about "grit" (Duckworth, 2016), "resilience," (Withers & Russell, 1999) and the "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1998; Payne, 2005) are touted as ways of teaching that are somehow responsive to historically marginalized students. However, scholars have critiqued these ways of thinking as reifying unjust social, political, and economic systems (e.g. Gorski, 2016; Love, 2019). Research has also illustrated that many practices which teachers believe are justice-oriented cause harm to students who have historically been marginalized (Kumashiro, 2002). For instance, educators who enact techniques such as STAR (*Sit up, Track the speaker, Ask and answer like a scholar, and Respect those around you*) in their classrooms of mostly Black and Brown students (Lemov, 2015) might be well-

intentioned in their motives for using these practices but are also causing harm by calling on historical legacies of controlling Black and Brown bodies (Valenti, 2019). Practices such as these are often described as justice-oriented or as facilitating the closure of the achievement gap, and yet they perpetuate oppressions. For this reason, now, perhaps more than ever, it is imperative that we interrogate how teacher educators are preparing teachers to enact justice-oriented teaching in schools as they navigate social, cultural, and political opposition.

Significance of the Study

As I was writing this chapter, I received an email: a call for manuscripts. The call asked for papers describing causal studies demonstrating how particular innovations or interventions in education led to tangible results. This idea runs rampant in educational research: that an intervention can be isolated and its impact can be studied to develop best practices that will allow teachers and students all over the United States to engage in clear, unproblematic teaching and learning. In this dissertation, I align myself with scholars who resist this narrative and who insist that we must engage in more complicated, and perhaps more chaotic, accounts of what happens in teaching and learning (e.g., Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; MacLure, 2003; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Unlike much of the existing research relating to teacher education, newly inducted teachers, and justice, this dissertation study considers the ways in which first year teachers respond to multiple, often contradictory conceptualizations of justice and the discourses they call upon in order to do so. This research does not seek to dictate what

works in justice-oriented teacher education or to arrive at the right way of pursuing justice in schools. Instead, I want to think “outside easy intelligibility and transparent understanding...in the hope that more interesting and useful ways of knowing will emerge" (Lather, 2006, p. 53). Considering how differing concepts of justice operate and how teachers defend or suppress those concepts offers the possibility to make more sense of what we talk about when we talk about justice in education, to view teachers more generously as we understand their complex positioning among discourses of justice, and to reimagine teacher education, induction, and professional learning to better attend to the ways contradictory ideas around justice function both inside and outside of schools.

The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore the ways in which teachers, who come into schools embedded in political, ideological, and social discourses, respond to varied conceptions of social justice they may encounter in schools. Although this study will focus on participants entering their first year of teaching, it is a study that is inextricably tied to teacher education. The participants completed their initial certification program only three months before the beginning of the study and thus were likely still closely connected to the ideas they encountered in their teacher education program. Further, an important purpose of this study is to contribute to the extant teacher education literature by illustrating the ways in which multiple ideas around justice circulating in schools, politics, social institutions, and media can complicate the simple transfer of justice-oriented teaching from the teacher education program to the new teacher’s classroom.

In the remainder of this dissertation, I offer my investigation into the questions *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of*

justice operating in schools? What discourses do they call upon in responding? In Chapter Two, I will characterize justice as a rascal concept and describe some of the complicated and contradictory ways that justice has been conceptualized and defended in education spaces. Then, in Chapter Three I situate the study in the empirical research. Chapter Four contains articulations of the theoretical and methodological positions rooted in poststructural ideas of discourse that I occupy in this dissertation. Chapters Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine illustrate some of the findings from the study by presenting central tensions that emerged in the participants' responses. Finally, in Chapter Ten I offer several insights regarding the implications of this research for teacher educators and school leaders.

As I alluded to in the opening of this chapter, this dissertation will not offer a clear, linear picture of who teachers are or what justice-oriented teacher educators should do to ensure that their courses and programs are maximally effective. Rather, I hope to offer an image, however fractured and contradictory, of how teachers seeking to do justice work are enabled and constrained by competing discourses emanating from powerful institutions such as their teacher education program, their administrators, the media, and their local communities. Like Lessing's (1962) *Golden Notebook*¸ this work may not adhere to neat conventions, yet I believe that the capturing of this complexity is meaningful for both teacher education and educational research more broadly.

CHAPTER TWO

JUSTICE AS A SLIPPERY CONCEPT IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

And it ought to make us feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we're talking about when we talk about love. (Carver, 1981)

Early in the dissertation, it is customary to offer a definition of terms, to state firmly what the author means when they invoke a particular word, especially a word that may be abstract and multi-faceted. The most central word to this dissertation (which, I will use over 1,000 times) is *justice*[7]. However, one of the central points of this dissertation is that the idea of justice in education is an amorphous and debated term, and that this lack of clarity has meaningful implications for teacher education programs, teachers, and school leaders.

In the opening of this chapter, I invoked Raymond Carver's oft-referenced short story, "What We Talk About When We Talk about Love," in which four characters sit at a table around a chilled bottle of gin and attempt to explain what it means to love, winding through stories of innocence, coyness, abuse, and suffering, stories which twist,

[7] I've wrestled with whether or not I should disclose how I think about justice in this dissertation. After all, my argument is that the concept is slippery, elusive, and always moving in multiple directions. So, it felt like my ideas about justice were irrelevant to the larger project of the dissertation. However, as I have discussed these chapters with my mentors and peers, it became clear that my own definition of justice has informed the writing of this dissertation. So, here, in a footnote where it is not part of the official argument of the larger piece, I will share that my definition of justice is most closely aligned with Kumashiro's (2000) anti-oppressive ideas, which are elaborated later in this chapter. While this idea about justice forms my own thinking, I worked hard (through several rounds of revision) to remove any judgment that may have surfaced in my analysis as a result of my conceptualization of justice. Of course, traces of my own thinking around justice are certainly still present in this dissertation.

contradict, and never actually land on a definition of what it means to love another person. Significantly, at the end of the story, the characters decide they should all go out and get something to eat, and yet they remain at the table, still and silent, even as the lights burn out. The title of this story has been appropriated into many fields (e.g. "What We Talk About When We Talk about Anne Frank," Englander, 2012; "What We Talk about When We Talk About God," Bell, 2013), and while the story is, of course, not a perfect parallel to education research, its central concept — about the complicatedness and inadequacy of language — is one which figures prominently into my analysis of the concept of justice in teacher education. Like the characters in Carver's story who struggle to nail down the meaning of love, theorists and researchers write about justice, and yet across all this discussion they cannot consistently define it. In fact, some of the circulating definitions stand in stark contrast to others (Boyles et al., 2009; North, 2006; Tuck & Yang, 2018). While this may seem like a theoretical or academic issue, far removed from the actual practices of teachers, later in this dissertation I will investigate how multiple concepts of justice interacted with other powerful discourses in the participants' language. To begin, though, I will situate justice as a slippery concept by tracing some of the variegated ways that the concept of justice has been given meaning in educational research.

An Abundance of Terms

A look to history demonstrates that there has never been an agreed-upon meaning of justice. For instance, Boyles et al., 2009) trace fundamental discrepancies in what is meant by justice back to the differing visions of Plato and Socrates. Adding to the complicated-ness of defining justice in education is the propensity of always emerging

and developing concepts and terms for justice-oriented work in education and teacher education such as: social justice (e.g. McDonald, 2007; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2009), multicultural education (e.g. Banks, 1993; Banks & Banks, 1994; Gay, 2013), critical pedagogy(e.g. Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2002), anti-racist education (e.g. Georgis & Kennedy, 2009), culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g. Villegas & Lucas, 2002a), culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g. Ladson Billings, 1995), non-violent pedagogy (Wang, 2013), compassionate pedagogy (e.g. Conklin, 2008;
Conklin & Hughes, 2016), and critically compassionate pedagogy (e.g. Rector Aranda, 2018), to name only a few.

The complexity of defining justice in educational research is highlighted in Hurd, Harrison, Brinegar, and Kennedy's (2017) literature review on culturally responsive pedagogy in middle grades education journals. In this work, the authors "identified over 170 terms to frame and discuss their work centered on educating young adolescents within marginalized identities" (p. 31). Of those 170 terms, only 21 (12 percent) of the terms were defined or cited in more than one of the articles reviewed. The authors noted that the abundance of terms used across the literature results in a field of academic study that has little congruence. This lack of cohesion could then make it difficult for educators to implement ideas from the literature as it is unclear how multiple concepts fit together (if at all). The complicated web of language describing justice positions teacher educators in a space that is difficult to navigate as they design curriculum and experiences for preservice teachers. Further, teachers who are motivated to pursue justice work may accept ideas labeled as justice-oriented as beneficial without interrogating the contradictory foundations on which they rest. In this dissertation project, I sought to dig

into how teachers respond to these multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses as a means of exploring what the abundance of conceptualizations of justice is doing in teacher education.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will offer insight into some of the ways in which popular concepts of justice in education differ from one another. The number of strands of justice-oriented scholarship which have emerged in educational research are far too many to enumerate and elaborate on in the scope of a single chapter. So, for the purpose of this project, I have chosen to focus on certain strands of justice-oriented work. I drew these strands from other articles which list various schools of thought on justice-oriented education such as North's (2006) political and theoretical exploration of scholarship around justice and Dover's (2009) conceptual framework on teaching for social justice, which is rooted in dominant frames for justice-oriented education that she found in her review of the literature. Further, I added in additional ways of thinking about and conceptualizing justice that were referenced by the participants in this study, such as ideas of justice as meritocracy. Because this dissertation needs to be readable and intelligible, I have attempted to categorize these strands of thinking about justice based on various convergences and divergences between them, including their theoretical grounding as well as how they relate to Fraser and Honneth's (2003) conceptualizations of justice as based on redistribution or recognition. However, it is important to note that these categorizations are tenuous "experiments with order and disorder [that form an] open-ended and ongoing process of making sense" (MacLure, 2013, p. 181). In other words, these ways of categorizing are not fixed and not perfect, and there are numerous other ways to think about and contextualize thinking and scholarship around justice.

Justice as Participation and Recognition: Liberal Theories

Ideas of justice rooted in liberal theories center on ideas of individuals as free and equal citizens (Gutmann & Porath, 2014) and advocate to ensure that all people are recognized and included in existing structures (Au & Sibbett, 2018). Thus, these frameworks are more about affirmation and access rather than a critique of existing structures.

The strands of justice-oriented teacher education which draw on liberal theories conceptualize justice as centered on recognition. This conceptualization "locates the core of all experiences of injustice in the withdrawal of social recognition, in the phenomena of humiliation and disrespect" (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 134). Multicultural education is the most widespread conception of justice-oriented teacher education grounded in recognition and focuses, in large part, on affirming difference in the curriculum and engaging with difference as a way to bring historically marginalized students closer to the mainstream. I will outline multicultural education as an example of liberal theories of justice in schools and teacher education programs.

Multicultural Education

Pushes for multicultural education stemmed from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's as a way of recognizing the new racial diversity in classrooms after school integration (Banks & Banks, 1994; Dover, 2013; McDonald and Zeichner, 2009). While multicultural education has been theorized as a multi-dimensional approach involving the integration of multicultural content into the curriculum, equitable classroom practices, and inclusive school culture (Banks & Banks, 1995), in teacher education practice it is

typically significantly flattened to only encompass the integration of diverse cultural groups into the curriculum (Dover, 2013; McDonald and Zeichner, 2009). Additionally, requiring PSTs to enroll in a multicultural education course, centered on representing historically marginalized students in the curriculum, has been one of the most profound ways in which teacher education programs have responded to directives from accrediting institutions to incorporate justice concepts into the teacher education program (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Thus, it is worth considering what this commitment to multicultural education represents in teacher education. The five central tenets of multicultural education are the incorporation of multicultural curricular content, an examination of how knowledge is constructed in the classroom, work to reduce prejudices, classroom practices that support achievement of students across racial and ethnic groups, and work to make school cultures more equitable (Banks, 1995; Dover, 2013).

In Banks & Banks's (1994) foundational text on multicultural education, the authors suggested that decisions about teaching students could be made based on belonging to particular identity categories. For instance, toward the end of a chapter on multicultural curriculum, there is a dedicated section of tips and considerations specifically for teachers who work in a "racially or ethnically integrated classroom or school" (p. 247). These tips included ideas such as integrating small groups in the classroom and countering deficit narratives around racial or ethnic minority students. Suggestions like these seem to suggest that group membership is the significant unit of analysis for making pedagogical decisions directed toward justice and further suggest that working toward social justice through multicultural initiatives primarily asks preservice teachers to consider changes to the curriculum in spaces where there are

students they identify as other or outside the “norm”. Thus, the primary goals of multicultural education align with conceptions of justice as recognition assumed by liberal theories.

Critiques of Liberal Theories of Justice

A central critique of liberal theories of justice is that they do not question the ultimate aims of education but rather, tend to accept the status quo as it relates to the meaning of educational equity and achievement. In other words, approaches such as multicultural education are seen as additive, incorporating more diverse texts or courses, rather than a fundamental questioning shake-up of existing structures. This acceptance opens up the space for equity in education to be defined as “existing when students are given equal access to education within an already stratified system” (Boyles et al., 2009). Because of this perception, liberal theories of justice-oriented education, such as multicultural education, are often viewed as more conservative than other strands of justice-oriented work (Sleeter, 1995).

Justice as Restructuring: Critical Theories

Critical theory is a large, multifaceted field populated by scholars ranging from Marx to the European Frankfurt School to Brazilian Paolo Freire among others (St. Pierre, 2000). Wang (2013) defined critically oriented frameworks for teacher education as those which come out of Freire’s (2000) work on critical consciousness and problem-posing education and that emphasize the restructuring of schools or societies such that those who have been marginalized are repositioned in places of power. Additionally, these frameworks emphasize group identity and conceptualize power as developing in groups coming to critical consciousness and then working together to arrive at a more just

social arrangement. Of the strands of justice-oriented teacher education discussed in this dissertation, culturally relevant pedagogy and social justice teacher education seem to stem from critical theory most directly because they have "a clearly defined notion of marginalized groups and [position] their struggles as against domination; in other words, the marginalized other becomes the subject of emancipation" (Wang, 2013, p. 488). This emancipatory orientation is the defining and unifying characteristic of critical theorists broadly.

While strands of justice-oriented education and teacher education rooted in liberal theories suggest justice centered on recognition and access, strands rooted in critical theories are connected to definitions of justice committed to equitable (re)distribution of goods, both material and immaterial. Justice centered on redistribution recognizes structural oppressions, often manifested in the unequal distribution of goods or capital, and calls for a restructuring of social institutions and processes to correct this unequal distribution (North, 2006). Each strand listed in this section on critical theories calls on teachers and teacher educators to critique existing social structures and to consider what these structures could look like if they were to be reconstructed differently. In social justice pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy this proposed reconstruction is one which moves from goals of curricular inclusion to goals of critiquing and altering existing power structures.

Social Justice Teacher Education

It is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of scholarship related to justice-oriented teacher education does not adhere to any of the other strands outlined in this paper, but is described simply as *social justice teacher education* (e.g. Apple,

2011; Cochran-Smith, 2004, 2010; McDonald, 2007; Sleeter, 2008; Ukpokodu, 2007; Zeichner, 2009). This scholarship does not always overtly attach itself to a theoretical position. However, broad definitions of social justice in education and teacher education describe "an attempt to effect holistic educational and societal transformation" (Dover, 2013, p. 6) or as an effort to "to know more and to be more, to see, to understand, to become more capable and more powerful" (Ayers et al., 2009, p. xiii). These goals position general concepts of social justice in education and teacher education as situated in critical theory and aimed at societal transformation and distributive justice.

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogies

The case of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy is particularly interesting and illustrative of the problems of defining terms in social justice teacher education. While these strands were theorized separately they are conceptually similar and followed similar trajectories in the way they have been taken up and used in teacher education.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995) forwarded her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy in response to previous calls for culturally appropriate pedagogy (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent pedagogy (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), and culturally compatible pedagogy (Vogt et al., 1987). Her fundamental critique of these pedagogies is that in each,

> student 'success' is represented in achievement within the current social structures extant in schools. Thus, the goal of education becomes how to 'fit' students constructed as 'other' by virtue of their race/ethnicity, language, or social class

> into a hierarchical structure that is defined as a meritocracy. However, it is unclear how these conceptions do more than reproduce current inequities. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467)

In other words, Ladson-Billings critiqued these other pedagogical movements - a critique that could rightfully be extended to strands of justice-oriented teacher education drawing on liberal theories, as well - for how they minimize difference to facilitate diverse students' assimilation into the status quo, namely schools rooted in White, middle class values.

Ladson-Billings (1995) drew on Collins's Black Feminist Thought (2002) and grounded theory stemming from her own pedagogical research to define culturally relevant pedagogy as "a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). In the foundational paper that defined culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995) went on to describe the characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogues based on her research of practicing teachers who taught African-American students. She found that the teachers she labeled as culturally relevant pedagogues shared conceptions of self and others which focused on community, saw pedagogy as always becoming, and positioned students as capable of success (p. 478). They also engaged in social relations which encouraged collaboration and connectedness. Finally, they all viewed knowledge as a non-static entity to always be engaged in critically. One of the three central criteria that Ladson-Billings lays out for culturally relevant pedagogy is critical consciousness, or an awareness of how

sociopolitical contexts impact both school structures and ideas around knowledge. This means that teacher educators must not only teach preservice teachers to know and adapt to their students, but also to recognize broader problematic structures in schooling. For this reason, culturally relevant pedagogy can be categorized as critical.

It should be noted that almost twenty years after her initial work in culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2014) expressed that she no longer saw culturally relevant pedagogy as the most useful way to do justice work in teacher education. She criticized the way her work was taken up by researchers, teacher educators, policymakers, and school leaders, writing:

> What state departments, school districts, and individual teachers are now calling 'culturally relevant pedagogy' is often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate. The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting 'diverse' images makes one 'culturally relevant' seems to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to. (p. 82)

In other words, culturally relevant pedagogy seemingly became "something a teacher can 'do' instead of a critical stance a teacher takes" (Schmeichel, 2012, p. 211). Ladson-Billings's (2014) critique of how culturally relevant pedagogy was taken up is similar to the very critique she launched against what I am calling the 'liberal pedagogies,' showcasing just how severely educators and institutions have distorted culturally relevant pedagogy in practice. However, despite Ladson-Billings's critique of what culturally relevant pedagogy became, and her endorsement of Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy instead, this strand of justice-oriented education and

teacher education is still being implemented and researched. In fact, since Ladson-Billings's (2014) article remixing culturally relevant pedagogy with other approaches, such as culturally sustaining pedagogies, over 2,000 articles relating to culturally relevant pedagogy and teacher education have been written, signaling that the attachment to this strand in the field is deep.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

In many ways, culturally responsive pedagogies are similar to culturally relevant pedagogies, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g. Powers & Duffy, 2016; Sleeter 2012; Stillman & Anderson, 2016). Culturally responsive pedagogy grew out of multicultural education as a way to use "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Thus, rather than seeking to incorporate cultural difference into the curriculum (as in multicultural education), culturally responsive pedagogy calls on educators to learn about the cultural experiences of students in the classroom in order to develop what Gay and Howard (2000) defined as cultural scaffolding, or ways that students can use "their own cultures and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement" (p. 109). In this way, culturally responsive pedagogy is typically described as something that teachers do in response to the presence of diverse students in their classrooms.

Scholars of culturally responsive pedagogy recognize that because the overwhelming majority of preservice teachers are White, female, and middle class, teacher educators must be intentional about defining and cultivating culturally responsive teachers. Villegas and Lucas (2002a) defined a culturally responsive teacher as one who

> (a) is socioculturally conscious, that is, recognizes that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one's location in the social order; (b) has affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be overcome; (c) sees himself or herself as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students; (d) understands how learners construct knowledge and is capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction; e) knows about the lives of his or her students; and (f) uses his or her knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar. (p. 21)

As a result of these aims, Villegas and Lucas (2002b) proposed that culturally responsive teacher education must center around learning about diverse cultural groups and their contributions as well as "develop[ing] rich repertoires of multicultural instructional examples to use in teaching ethnically diverse students" (p. 113). Further, Villegas and Lucas position teachers as "participants in a larger struggle for social justice whose actions either support or challenge current inequalities" (2002a, p. 55). In this way, culturally responsive pedagogy is firmly rooted in a critical stance, with explicit emphasis placed on preparing teachers to challenge oppressive structures and work toward justice in the classroom.

Frameworks for culturally responsive pedagogy recognize that there can be significant variation and diversity even within a defined cultural group and that culture is not static (Gay, 2002). Thus, the task for culturally responsive teacher education is not to

prescribe particular strategies to particular students based on their cultural affiliations, but rather to help preservice teachers learn ways to get to know their students that can be used in the teachers' future classrooms because "it would be unrealistic to expect teachers-to-be to develop the extensive and sophisticated pedagogical knowledge and skills of culturally responsive teachers during their preservice preparation" (Gay, 2002, p. 30). In this way, culturally responsive pedagogy is more a stance and way of thinking about students, classrooms, and schools than a prescribed list of steps or interventions for teaching.

However, as culturally responsive pedagogy has been taken up by teacher education programs and schools, it too has been flattened to be something more akin to cultural celebration which tends to "relegate attention to culture to the margins of instruction, ignore low academic expectations for students as well as the lived culture of the school and classroom…and ignore power relations all together" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 568). This move from the original intent of culturally responsive pedagogy as a critical stance to its frequent implementation as a series of checklists for bringing information about diverse cultures into the classroom is akin to the misappropriation Ladson-Billings (2014) described in the ways educators have taken up culturally relevant pedagogy. For this reason, the work of theorizing what teacher educators talk about when talking about justice in teacher education becomes more and more crucial. The terms used to describe teacher education are numerous and varied, and the ways they are taken up are inconsistent and contradictory.

Critiques of Critical Theories of Justice

Critiques of conceptions of social justice rooted in critical theory include the over-emphasis on minority/majority binaries which is seen as leading “to social violence in the first place, so another way of categorizing us versus them does not necessarily undo the mechanism of objectification and domination." (Wang, 2013, p. 487). In other words, critics see that critical theory can maintain strict divisions between identity categories which may ultimately impede efforts toward justice. Additionally, some scholars argue that critical approaches can reproduce troubling relations of domination in which one type of powerful oppressor is replaced by another, the critical pedagogue (Ellsworth, 1989; Kumashiro, 2000) or the “transformative intellectual…[who is] the origin of what can be known and done” (Lather, 1992, p. 127). Said differently, there are concerns that the emancipatory work borne of critical theories could result in the reshuffling of structures of domination rather than their dismantling.

Finally, any concept of justice rooted in redistribution is inherently complicated, especially if the basis of the redistribution is not purely material. Considering the redistribution of immaterial concepts such as power, influence, or status requires those ideas to be defined such that they can be quantified, monitored, and controlled. Because of this, it can be significantly more difficult to imagine, define, and pursue redistributive justice. More difficult still is communicating this aim in a way that is both clear and actionable for preservice teachers as they consider their work with future students. So, it is not entirely surprising that when ideas like culturally
responsive and relevant pedagogies were adopted by institutions, they were changed to become more concrete, more assessable, and less attached to redistributive justice.

Justice as Constant Disruption: Poststructural Theories

While liberal and critical conceptions of justice-oriented work are most cited in the literature (Wang, 2013), they do not exhaust all of the possible foundations for conceptualizing justice. For instance, there is a growing trend to explore poststructural theories as a way to conceptualize justice work in teacher education. In approaches to justice-oriented teacher education rooted in poststructural theories, "social differences are perceived as fluid, multiple, ever-changing, and conflicting; and any universal and essential project of emancipation is under question" (Wang, 2013, p. 487). While this troubling of the problematic dualisms of critical theory can be productive in particular ways, it is pedagogically more difficult to communicate, as structures of education and accountability systems often rely on firm categories or binaries. Additionally, rather than operating under the assumption that power is an entity which is possessed by particular individuals and groups in a static way poststructural conceptualizations often rely on Foucault's (1978) notion of power as something which circulates and is positioned in specific, localized conditions (Lather, 1992). To illustrate what poststructural theories can mean in justice-oriented teacher education, below I outline Kumashiro's (2000) concept of anti-oppressive education and teacher education.

Anti-Oppressive Education

In his theory of anti-oppressive education, Kumashiro (2000) critiqued approaches to social justice education that seek to only incorporate information about the Other[8] into curriculum because doing so allows for the presentation of "a dominant

[8] Throughout this section on anti-oppressive education, I will use Kumashiro's (2000) language of 'the Other' to talk about historically marginalized individuals. Kumashiro (2000) who used the term other "to refer to those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e. that are *other than* the norm, such as students of color, students from under- or un-employed families, students who are female, or male but not

narrative of the Other's experience…that becomes essentialized and remains different from the norm" (p. 33). He also argued that education about the Other "should be done not to fill a gap in knowledge (as if ignorance about the Other were the only problem), but to disrupt the knowledge that is already there" (p. 34). In other words, more attention should be paid to disrupting oppressive narratives about historically marginalized individuals alongside incorporating diverse and multicultural figures and ideas into the classroom. He also critiqued the critical theories outlined earlier in this paper because "structural explanations cannot account for diversity and particularity" and because "experiences of oppression involve many contradictions" (p. 38). Kumashiro explained that individuals occupy multiple social positions which can be oversimplified by structural explanations of oppression. He also cautioned against work informed by critical theories because of the potential to "replac[e] one (socially hegemonic) framework for seeing the world with another (academically hegemonic) one" (p. 39), and instead proposed that teacher educators should use elements of critical pedagogy in their teaching while also interrogating with their students what those theories makes possible and what they leave unthinkable in a process of constant disruption.

Kumashiro (2000) forwarded anti-oppressive education as education that changes students and society. In articulating his stance, he called upon poststructural theories as well as queer and feminist readings of psychoanalysis. Drawing on scholars such as Walkerdine (1990) and Butler (1997), he contended that:

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stereotypically 'masculine,' and students who are, or are perceived to be, queer…students with disabilities, students with limited or no English-language proficiency, and students from non-Christian religious backgrounds" (p. 26). Kumashiro's use of this language reflects his commitment to not talk about identities in singular ways, since identity is always multiple and always in flux.

> oppression originates in discourse, and, in particular, in the citing of particular discourses which frame how people think, feel, act, and interact. In other words, oppression is the citing of harmful discourses and the repetition of harmful histories. (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 40).

If oppression is the repetition of harmful discourses, then Kumashiro argues that the work of justice-oriented teacher education is to disrupt that repetition and thereby perhaps change the citational practices within a classroom, school, or teacher preparation program. Thus, the task of teacher education is to make these discourses visible and to equip preservice teachers with ways of deconstructing and disrupting the "common sense" practices of schooling and society (Kumashiro, 2015).

Critiques of Poststructural Theories of Justice

Poststructural conceptions of justice-oriented teacher education differ significantly from liberal and critical theories. First, while liberal theories define justice in terms of recognition and participation, and critical theories define justice as redistribution, Kumashiro (2000) wrote that justice is "look[ing] beyond what is known…ask[ing], 'what is not said?' and then go[ing] places that have, until now, been foreclosed" (p. 44). Said differently, the justice of redistribution proposed by critical theories operates under the assumption that scholars already know the redistributive changes which need to be made to approach more just teaching and learning, and the justice proposed in liberal theory assumes that access to diverse curriculum and a democratic process is a known path to justice. Because anti-oppressive education does not claim a particular end-goal of relations of power, anti-oppressive teacher education

does not lend itself to particular curriculum or methods and can be difficult to adapt into actual practice in teacher education.

Another way that Kumashiro's (2000) poststructural conception of justice-oriented teacher education differs from liberal and critical theories is in how it imagines the individual. Rather than seeing the individual as a coherent and rational actor (St. Pierre, 2000), Kumashiro and other poststructural theorists emphasize the contingency and multiplicity of identity categories. Kumashiro explained,

> It is a problem, then, to speak of identities always and only in their separate(d) incarnations, which not only denies the already-intersectedness of identities, but more importantly, masks the already-privileged status of certain identities. In particular, treating identity as singular allows only certain identities to count as authentic, only certain ones to matter when learning about what it means to be of that group...The naming of difference, then, whether in activist communities or inclusive curricula, can serve less to describe who a group is, and more to prescribe who a group ought to be. (p. 5)

In other words, attaching particular names or categories to groups of individuals is problematic both because it could serve to deny the many identities that attach to an individual and because naming particular groups or categories can suggest that members of that group are expected to express themselves and behave in particular ways. Thus, anti-oppressive education is not a strategy for thinking about alleviating the oppression or marginalization of particular groups, but rather a strategy of interrogating all educational practices for the way they privilege or silence the entire spectrum of ways of being. This

stands in contrast to some other frameworks outlined in this chapter which point to culture as something distinct and held by particular groups.

However, the emphasis on the many ways individuals engage with ways of being also leads to one of the most often-cited critiques of poststructural theories. The theories which underlie Kumashiro's (2000) work were developed primarily White men in the decades surrounding the civil rights movement and other liberation movements. Thus, critics argue that the denial of group membership as a crucial tool in analyzing power structures can be read as a move by White men to deny the collective agency of populations fighting for recognition and power (Lather, 1991). Additionally, poststructural theories could also be critiqued for seeming too abstract and too difficult for both teachers and teacher educators to translate into practice, particularly while being held accountable to standards, assessments, and other large-scale accountability practices.

Justice as Merit: Neoliberal Theories

While not often discussed in the scholarly literature on justice in education, there is another significant body of thought on what is just in schooling that must be addressed to depict the landscape of education in the United States more accurately. Neoliberal discourse is a powerful force which privileges the capitalist economic framework as the way to structure all aspects of human life, including the educational, political, and social spheres (Foucault, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Schmeichel et al., 2017). Kumashiro (2012) summarized this thinking succinctly, saying that in a neoliberal ethos, "competition will solve all our problems" (p. 37). In education, neoliberal thinking has manifested in multiple ways ranging from the upsurge of high-stakes standardized testing

(Apple, 2001), the rise in alternative teacher certification programs (Zeichner, 2010), the burgeoning charter school movement (Baltodano, 2012), and the push to privatize significant portions of the public education system (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Neoliberal education reforms have frequently been marketed using language associated with social justice and human rights, such as "No Child Left Behind" or "Education for All" (Zeichner, 2010). However, in their application, these reforms tended to be more about increased standardization and penalization for failing to meet benchmarks adequately. The logic of neoliberal reform is that "the problem is not the system…but merely the lack of effort by or knowledge of the individual schools or teachers" (Kumashiro, 2012, p. 37). Thus, any issues of inequity that arise are not the result of systemic barriers or power imbalances, but of insufficient effort by individuals. This neoliberal ethos was manifested in the 2009 Race to the Top program, which placed states in competition with one another to earn grant funding from the federal government. Programs like Race to the Top further normalized the argument that all is fair within the free market, and it is up to individuals to make themselves competitive within that market.

Scholars committed to visions of justice, rooted in liberal, critical, or poststructural theories have critiqued the idea of equity as the opportunity to compete within the free market. Typically, neoliberal theories of education are grounded in the assumption that all people enter the competitive market on a level playing field. However, critics of this thinking point out that systemic oppressions have created meaningful barriers that function to limit the competitive potential of historically marginalized communities. In Chapter Nine I will further elaborate on how neoliberal

discourse brushes up against other conceptualizations of justice to create tension in the participants' responses to questions about doing justice-oriented work in their classrooms.

Navigating Multiple Ideas of Justice

It is worth reiterating that this is not an exhaustive exploration of conceptualizations of justice that are at work in schools and teacher education programs. However, by illustrating some of the foundational differences that exist between circulating frameworks for justice-oriented work, I hope to have at least partially demonstrated the complexity of the idea of justice in education. At the most basic level, across most of the strands of justice (excluding meritocratic theories of justice), scholars address the existence of a "situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being (e.g. having certain identities) are privileged in society while others are marginalized" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 25), and each of these strands recognizes a need to change that marginalization. However, scholars within these strands differ in what they identify as the causes of marginalization, what the end of marginalization could look like, and what work should be done to change the conditions of its emergence. These approaches to justice-oriented education are not only non-uniform, but in some ways expressly contradictory.

While scholars have grappled with the quantity of terms and ideas related to justice in education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; North, 2006; 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2018; Wang, 2013), this work has been critiqued for focusing too much on the theoretical existence of multiple and contradictory ways of thinking about justice rather than empirical research into the effects of their existence (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). My purpose for the remainder of this dissertation is to investigate how these varying concepts

of justice are (or are not) acting upon first-year teachers who self-identify as justice-oriented. Further, I will look into how these ideas of justice may be reinforced or constrained by other circulating discourses. Through this work, I illustrate that educating teachers to enact justice-oriented pedagogies is not simply a matter of introducing them to the correct way of thinking about justice and modeling lessons or interactions for them to take up in their own classrooms. Rather, it is a complex process that must involve an acknowledgement of the varied and contradictory understandings of justice which may circulate during a teacher's career, as well as a consideration of how teacher educators are preparing preservice teachers to recognize, evaluate, and respond to these varied ideas. While this chapter focused on writings about justice in education that are theoretical in nature, in the next chapter I will situate these different ways of thinking about justice in the current empirical literature in the field.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Justice

At the end of Carver's (1981) short story, "What We Talk about When We Talk About Love," the uncertainty around what it means to love is symbolically manifested through a kind of paralysis. The characters make plans for the rest of the evening, they decide to move forward, and yet no one does. They remain in place indefinitely, through the end of the story and perhaps forever. Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) outline that one of the most significant critiques of justice work in education is *the ambiguity critique*, the idea that when justice can mean anything and everything, it is ultimately meaningless and difficult to act upon in productive ways. In this chapter, I have illustrated some of the varied ways that justice has been conceptualized in the literature. In the remainder of the project, by investigating six first-year teachers' responses to questions around differing

ideas of justice, I considered whether the fate of justice-oriented participants is similar to that of the characters in Carver's story – are they paralyzed by the slippery concept of justice —unable to act for their confusion? Are they committed to act in one particular way? Or, perhaps, does something more complicated emerge?

CHAPTER THREE

SITUATING THE DISSERTATION IN EMPIRICAL TEACHER EDUCATION LITERATURE

> *The Book of Antecedents, once updated yearly, was now continually updated, and when there was nothing to report, the full-time committee would report its reporting, just to keep the book moving, expanding, becoming more like life: We are writing…we are writing…we are writing… (Foer, 2002, p. 196)*

In the novel *Everything is Illuminated*[9], Jonathan Safran Foer[10] (2002) is particularly concerned with history and the way it is documented. Much of the book is dedicated to illustrating a mostly fictionalized history of the real Ukrainian shtetl of Trachimbrod. The residents of Trachimbrod are also deeply concerned with documenting and preserving their history. In the book, Foer describes how the residents begin chronicling all of the important events that take place in the town in a text called *The Book of Antecedents.* Over time the boundaries of what merits documentation in the book become unclear and the writers become more concerned with ensuring that the book is thorough, leading them to eventually begin recording every single thing that happens in

[9] While this book comes from a significantly more contemporary time than the other texts used to frame this dissertation, it entered my life at roughly the same time and functioned to support my unlearning of linear structures and narrative conventions.

[10] Like *The Golden Notebook* (Lessing, 1962), this text has received some significant critiques. As mentioned previously, my task in this project is not to explicate those critiques, but rather to use these texts as a way into thinking about the research presented in the dissertation.

the town. When nothing is happening, they simply fill the book by writing "*we are writing…we are writing…we are writing*,"[11] (p. 196) sometimes for pages at a time.

Reviewing scholarly literature sometimes feels like writing a *Book of Antecedents*. So much is happening. The field is moving in so many different directions. Everything feels important. It seems impossible to not let some detail, some study, some moment slip through the cracks. And I am writing. I am writing. I am writing as Google Scholar notifications appear in my inbox: a new article, a new book, a new chapter. How will my review ever adequately contain all there is to know, to summarize, to contextualize[12]?

The task of reviewing scholarly literature grows even more monumental when the literature at hand focuses on justice-oriented teacher education. As described in Chapter Two, there is no agreed-upon definition of justice-oriented work in teacher education. Thus, to review the field means to move in many directions and to follow each strand as it multiplies and develops. To illustrate in this chapter the ways scholars are continuously conducting work that pertains to each of the strands of justice I outlined in Chapter Two, I conducted an exploration of publications since the 2016 US Presidential Election[13] using three databases: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and Education Research Complete. I then completed separate searches for each strand of justice with

[11] When I taught middle school Language Arts and my students complained they had nothing to write, I always had them begin writing "I am writing…I am writing…I am writing…". Without fail they would begin writing their own words and ideas within minutes.

[12] To say nothing of the myriad ways the research is contextualized outside of the literature.

[13] I used this date as a boundary due to the increased need for justice work in schools following the rise of hate incidents that accompanied this election and persisted in its aftermath.

"teacher education" as the first term and then "multicultural," "culturally responsive," "culturally relevant," "culturally sustaining," "critical," "anti-oppressive," and "achievement gap" as the second search term. In Table 1, I illustrate how many articles resulted for each set of search terms since 2016.

Table 1

Quantity of Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles Citing Various Strands of Justice

Justice Strand	Number of Academic Journal Articles
Culturally Relevant	851
Culturally Sustaining	114
Culturally Responsive	635
Multicultural	1,160
Anti-oppressive	33
Social Justice	1,535
Critical Pedagogy	371
Achievement gap	149

I share these numbers to illustrate the vastness of the field, but rest assured, I will not be walking through each of these 4,848 articles in this chapter[14]. In this case, *The Book of Antecedents* is already part-written because the field of justice-oriented teacher education has been the subject of numerous comprehensive and systematic literature reviews (e.g., Kaur, 2012; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016; Pugach et al., 2019; Wideman, 2012). In the interest of not re-doing the brilliant, meticulous work of these scholars, I will instead

[14] Of course this search method is imperfect. Some of the articles may cite multiple terms. Or some articles could be critiques of these particular strands of thought. However, I found that the exercise of looking at the field of justice-oriented education literature through this search was helpful in two ways. First, it laid out the vastness of the field, which is even more overwhelming when one considers that these strands do not encompass all of the ways justice is conceptualized in teacher education. Further, noting the frequency with which particular strands are used in the literature illustrated which seem to be taken up most often. In this case, multicultural and social justice teacher education.

focus this review on particular trends in the field that I see as especially important to this dissertation study. I will then articulate how this dissertation responds to the field of justice-oriented teacher education as it currently exists[15] and how I, like the authors of the *Book of Antecedents,* hope to use the act of researching and writing to develop a text that makes the literature in the field "more like life" (Foer, 2002, p. 196).

Centering Dispositions

One of the most essential questions in researching justice in teacher education is deciding what, precisely, to research. Should the subject of the research be the content of teacher education programs and courses (e.g., McDonald, 2008)? Preservice teachers' attitudes or dispositions (e.g., Regan et al., 2016; Warren, 2018)? The practices of graduates of these programs (e.g., Kelly & Brandes, 2010; Whipp, 2013)? For the purpose of this project, I focus on one especially large category of justice-oriented teacher education research, changing teachers' dispositions toward justice, in order to highlight some of the central assumptions that I will challenge in the remainder of this dissertation. Specifically, I describe some of the different ways that teacher education scholars have experimented with teacher education courses, programs, and practices as interventions that might significantly impact preservice teachers' dispositions related to justice.

[15] As it exists at the precise moment of my writing of this chapter. Of course, new (and probably helpful) literature will continue to be published every single day after the submission of this dissertation. Just thinking about this makes me anxious.

In 2001, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)[16], an institution that grants accreditation to teacher education programs across the United States, added language to their guiding documents indicating that teacher education programs needed to evaluate teachers based on a number of dispositions, including social justice.[17] This inclusion meant that teacher education programs needed to teach and assess their students not only to meet particular goals related to pedagogy and professionalism, but also for their dispositions related to justice. In the years since, the quantity of teacher education research focusing on dispositions toward justice has continuously multiplied, with numerous teacher education researchers focusing their work on assessing, tracking, and developing preservice teachers' dispositions toward justice[18].

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, and ideas related to social justice are thought to powerfully influence teaching practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Regan et al., 2016). Further, scholars have asserted that what teachers learn in teacher education is contingent on the perspectives and beliefs with which they enter the program (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Wideen et al., 1998). Some scholars have argued that dispositions "serve as filters through which teachers view and interact with students, communities, classrooms,

[16] In 2010, NCATE merged with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) to become a new organization, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (CAEP, 2022a). The current, 2022 CAEP standards for teacher preparation programs do contain language that states that a program must "facilitate candidates' reflection of their personal biases to increase their understanding and practice of equity, diversity, and inclusion" (CAEP, 2022b).

[17] This addition became quite controversial and the language of social justice was later removed from the document. Much has been written about NCATE's decision to remove the language of social justice from their standards (e.g. Butin, 2007; Heybach, 2009). However, even once the language was removed, the question of dispositions has remained central to the field of research on justice-oriented teacher education.

[18] Many of these explorations will be discussed later in the dissertation.

and institutions" (Milner, 2005; Regan et al., 2016; Villegas, 2007). However, despite the large number of scholars who assert that dispositions toward justice are important for preservice teachers' implementation of justice-oriented practices, there is significant disagreement in the field about what precisely dispositions *are* (Thompson et al., 2005). Scholars have used the term *dispositions* to describe trends in behavior (Burant et al., 2007; Katz & Raths, 1985; Warren, 2018); tendencies to act in particular ways tied to beliefs (Villegas, 2007); educational virtues (Bautista et al., 2018); "relationships to social justice beliefs" (Boylan & Woolsey, 2015, p. 63); ideas about who students (especially historically marginalized) should be (Kumashiro, 2000); responses to lived experiences (Brown, 2004); Bordieuan habitus (Mills, 2013); or internalized narratives individuals bring to lived situations (Davies & Harré, 1990; Rogers et al., 2006). In other words, researchers seem to think that something beyond teachers' technical skills matters for their work, and more particularly their work with historically marginalized populations, but there is no clear understanding on precisely what that something is, how it might be accessed, or the extent to which it is fixed or mutable. Teacher educators have approached addressing the presumed importance of justice-oriented dispositions in two ways: first, by emphasizing the need to admit preservice teachers who are predisposed to possessing these dispositions, and second, by designing educational interventions to change these dispositions.

Identifying the Right Candidates

One significant body of research on justice-oriented dispositions in teacher education relates to identifying the characteristics of preservice teachers who are more likely to have justice-oriented dispositions or to develop them over the course of their

teacher education program. The underlying logic of these studies is typically that teacher education, and especially justice-oriented teacher education, can only be effective if the *right* types of candidates are admitted to teacher education programs: candidates whose identities and experiences suggest that they are more likely to develop justice-oriented dispositions.

An example of the attitudes underlying these studies is summed up by Garmon (2004) who explained that teacher education is "insufficient to counteract the power of students' preexisting attitudes and beliefs" (p. 211). In his study, Garmon identified a preservice teacher who seemed to respond positively to the justice-oriented content of her teacher education program. He then conducted extensive interviews with her to identify what about her made her so amenable to developing a justice-oriented stance. Garmon noted six factors that seemed to influence her justice-oriented growth: three dispositional factors, openness, self-awareness, and commitment to social justice, as well as three experiential factors, intercultural experiences, support group experiences, and educational experiences. Ultimately, Garmon suggested that teacher-education programs take these dispositional and experiential factors into consideration when making admissions decisions.

Mills (2009) arrived at conclusions similar to Garmon's (2004) following a study of the dispositions of 24 preservice teachers at different stages of two separate teacher preparation programs in Australia. The findings from the study illustrated that there were not significant differences between the justice-oriented dispositions of the preservice teachers who were early in their teacher education program and those who were at the end of their teacher education program. From these findings, Mills concluded that indeed,

teacher education was not the only influence that shaped the preservice teachers' dispositions toward justice and suggested the need for additional study of what other factors might be shaping preservice teachers' justice-oriented dispositions. In the meantime, though, Mills affirmed the idea that teacher educators should prioritize admitting students who are more likely to take on justice-oriented dispositions.

Another way that researchers have considered how teacher education programs might admit the *right* candidates to justice-oriented programs focuses on the relationship of identity categories to justice-oriented dispositions. For example, Cherng and Davis (2019) studied how preservice teachers' characteristics such as race/ethnicity, education, and prior experiences influenced their justice-oriented dispositions as well as how those dispositions shaped pedagogical practices. To consider these questions, the researchers examined two data sources for over 1,400 preservice teachers at a large, private university in the mid-Atlantic United States. First, they studied the participants' responses on the Educational Beliefs and Attitudes Scale (Tobias, 2013) which "captures the teachers' awareness of, comfort with, and sensitivity to issues of cultural pluralism in the classroom" (Cherng & Davis, 2019, p. 225) through a Likert-style scale. Second, the researchers analyzed observation protocols completed by university supervisors during the same preservice teachers' student teaching placements. They found that there were significant differences in justice orientations for preservice teachers who fell into different identity categories. For instance, they found that racial/ethnic minorities, women, international students, and graduate students (as opposed to undergraduate students) were more likely to express justice-oriented dispositions. Further, they observed that there was some correlation between those dispositions and classroom practices.

Ultimately, Cherng and Davis argued that these findings could shape recruitment for teacher education.

Studies like these assert that while teacher education can provide valuable learning for preservice teachers, strong dispositions toward justice-oriented work seem to be associated with particular identity categories and experiences. Some researchers go so far as to suggest that as a result, teacher education may not be enough to counter the dispositions that preservice teachers bring to their programs. While I commend these researchers' focus on developing justice-oriented teachers to send into the field, I critique several aspects of these studies. First, these studies tend to depict preservice teachers as falling into one of two categories, either possessing strong justice-oriented dispositions or lacking those dispositions. I suggest that the experiences of preservice teachers are much more complicated than these binary categories can contain. Further, studies like the ones outlined above that attempt to categorize preservice teachers' attitudes or dispositions based on a survey measure or set of interviews that occurred over a short interval of time likely only reflect those preservice teachers' responses to justice-oriented ideas at that particular moment. Thus, I argue that these studies which attempt to pin down the correct characteristics of a justice-oriented preservice teacher likely oversimplify the many ways the preservice teachers may react to justice-oriented ideas over time.

Teacher Education as Intervention

A body of research related to the dispositions of justice-oriented preservice teachers emphasizes that part of the work of teacher education is to *change* those dispositions such that they are more justice oriented (Helm, 2006; Mills, 2013; Sleeter,

2001; Villegas, 2007). Because of the assertion that positive dispositions toward social justice are associated with positive learning outcomes for students as well as the belief that teacher education can be a meaningful intervention in developing these dispositions (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Day-Vines, 2000; Han & Thomas, 2010; Pedro, Miller & Bray, 2012), significant research has been dedicated to assess and improve upon (Cherng & Davis, 2019) preservice teachers' social justice beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions.

Studies of preservice teachers' dispositions and beliefs around social justice are often focused on interventions that occur within the traditional structures of a teacher education program. One common way these dispositions are examined is through cause-and-effect studies, in which teacher educators design a course, program, or assignment as an intervention to immerse preservice teachers in particular justice-oriented discourses, and then study the impact of those interventions to see if there is any change in preservice teachers' dispositions toward justice. In what follows, I present a summary of some of the studies that have positioned teacher education as an intervention to developing preservice teachers' justice-oriented dispositions. I have categorized these studies based on which component of teacher education was highlighted as an intervention: a course, an entire program, or a specific innovative practice.

Courses as Interventions

Numerous studies focus on studying a particular course as an intervention meant to increase justice-oriented dispositions in preservice teachers. It is understandable why a single course would be considered a ripe location for studying justice orientations in preservice teachers. For one, many teacher education programs require only one course in

their curriculum to focus on issues of diversity or justice (Ladson-Billings, 2014), and thus these courses may be the only spaces available for this work at some universities. Additionally, a particular justice-oriented teacher educator may have more freedom to design a course than to alter the larger structure of a teacher education program. While it is beyond the scope of this review to outline all of the studies of individual courses that have been published, I will offer descriptions of several studies that I see as representative of the field more broadly.

Some studies exist which note the transformative power of a single teacher education course. For instance, Frederick et al. (2010) examined how preservice teachers' ideas about justice and inequity changed throughout a Foundations of Education course. The authors describe the course as emphasizing the embeddedness of American education in sociopolitical contexts and offering "multiple opportunities for teacher candidates to confront their racialized and classed positionality" (p. 318). By looking at the preservice teachers' writing over the course of the semester as well as their responses to questionnaires designed by the researchers, the authors identified "transformative thinking" as participants began to interrogate their experiences and initiate discussions about justice issues. Blanchard et al. (2018) also used preservice teachers' written work from a semester-long online course on diversity and equity to identify how they responded to online lessons focusing on race, culture, gender roles, and socioeconomic diversity. They noted significant moments of tension in the participants' responses, but ultimately found a pattern of growth toward more justice-oriented thinking through self-reflection and writing.

While some studies have found teacher education courses to be an effective intervention in developing justice-oriented teachers, many more studies have found more complicated findings. For example, Nash (2018) conducted an ethnographic study of four preservice teachers in a large, public predominately white university in the Southeastern United States as they completed a course that applied critical perspectives to elementary literacy course in order to examine how literacy education from a critical race perspective can shape preservice teachers' dispositions. The course, which took place at a predominantly African American elementary school, engaged preservice teachers with texts about race, culturally relevant/responsive lesson plans, diverse children's literature, visiting children's homes, and attending a lecture series. While Nash found that by the end of the course the preservice teachers were eager to incorporate multicultural libraries, warm demander pedagogy, and engagement with students' prior experiences, the preservice teachers still rooted their conversations about these topics in "blinding White racial discourse" (p. 165) and problematic binary thinking. In other words, while the participants were eager to take up some of the strategies they learned in the class, the researcher described their thinking at the end of the course as still steeped in Eurocentric thinking that was so deeply ingrained the preservice teachers did not notice or question it.

Boutte (2018) studied a course on culturally relevant early childhood education. She critiqued courses that attempted to reach justice-oriented goals by simply adding in the voices of historically marginalized populations and instead focused her course on helping preservice teachers identify systemic inequities. The findings of her article primarily outline her experiences with student resistance to the lessons she taught. She concluded that while one possible reading of this resistance is that those preservice

teachers needed more time to unpack and reckon with the content of the course and that the reality for teacher educators might be that they need to approach their practice with a sober hope, recognizing that they cannot expect "miraculous, uncomplicated changes" (p. 178) as a result of a teacher education program.

In their study on a teacher education course at a predominately white institution in the midwestern United States that centered on Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies, Aronson and Myers (2020) also came to question the possibility of meaningful change in preservice teachers' thinking as a result of a single course. The authors collected artifacts from 100 preservice teachers enrolled in the course in order to investigate how the teachers' understandings of racism and whiteness, especially related to teaching and schools, changed over the course of the semester. The artifacts collected included journal reflections, presentations, lesson plans, assessments, and observation notes. The authors analyzed the data through thematic coding. While the authors noted that some of the preservice teachers seemed to be indicating moves toward critical consciousness in their assignments, it was unclear whether those responses were performative and simply saying what the instructors/researchers wanted to hear. The authors conclude that a single course is insufficient to both make and study changes in preservice teachers' thinking about justice and that instead larger sequences of justice-oriented courses need to be developed and implemented.

While these studies do not represent *all* of the research that has been done on single teacher education courses as interventions to change justice-oriented dispositions, they paint a representative picture of the field. Some authors have identified significant changes in preservice teachers' dispositions or attitudes as a result of a teacher education

course (e.g. Blanchard, 2018; Frederick et al., 2010). However, more often than not, researchers have found that a single course in a teacher education program does not act as a significant or powerful-enough change agent for creating justice-oriented preservice teachers (e.g. Aronson & Myers, 2020; Boutte, 2018; Nash, 2018).

Programs as Intervention

A smaller but still significant body of research studies how teacher education programs that are described as justice-oriented might act as interventions to educate justice-oriented teachers. However, similar to the studies of single teacher education courses, these explorations also note complicated findings.

For instance, Regan, Chen, and Vernikoff (2016) critiqued studies that focus on a single course and instead studied three preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching for justice at multiple points in time over the course of their teacher preparation program situated in a selective Research-1 university in New York City. The researchers examined the participants' entrance essays which included topics such as the most critical issues facing urban schools as well as their interests in the program, autobiographical analysis papers they wrote midway through the program focused on their lived experiences and assumptions about children and schools, and a Likert-style survey completed at the end of the program that included questions about their beliefs related to teaching for justice. Regan, Chen, and Vernikoff found that the preservice teachers' language shifted over the course of the program to express more nuanced understandings of justice-oriented teaching. Further, the participants left the program endorsing justice-oriented teaching. One notable limitation of this study as an example of how programs can intervene in

preservice teachers' justice-oriented dispositions is that it was conducted in a teacher preparation program that was expressly marketed as justice-oriented. Thus, the students who enrolled may have been predisposed to those attitudes.

Other studies of the impacts of justice-oriented teacher education programs found less optimistic results. For example, Bautista, Misco, and Quaye (2018) conducted a case study consisting of surveys and interviews with students enrolled in a justice-oriented teacher education program at a university in the midwestern United States who were identified as closed-minded or somewhat closed-minded using the Actively Open-Minded Thinking Scale (Stanovich & West, 2007) in order to examine how their stances were affected by the teacher education program. The authors noted two particularly significant findings: first, that closed-minded attitudes were most commonly associated with preservice teachers with strong religious views that influenced their epistemological and ontological stances. Second, Bautista et al. found that for those closed-minded students, the "teacher preparation program and the curriculum failed to help the participants develop the open-minded beliefs and views that are essential to meet the needs of a 21st-century classroom" (p. 166). Like many of the researchers who studied single courses in teacher education, the authors of this study were left wondering whether epistemological stances toward justice should influence teacher education admissions and further how graduates' stances toward justice should be communicated and assured to future employers.

Studies of preservice teachers' dispositions over the course of an entire justice-oriented teacher education program are somewhat rarer than studies of a single course. This is not surprising as programs that are fully centered around justice orientations are

less common than programs that offer one or more justice-oriented courses alongside more traditional teacher education courses. However, longitudinal studies like those described above could potentially allow for more nuanced insights into the non-linear and complex ways that preservice teachers respond to justice-oriented teacher education programs.

Innovative Practices as Intervention

In addition to analyses of preservice teachers' experiences in traditional teacher education structures, many researchers have studied the impact of practices that are not as common in teacher education on preservice teachers' justice-oriented dispositions. For instance, several studies focused on programs that paired preservice teachers with someone from a different background than their own (Damrow & Sweeney, 2019; Riley & Solic, 2017; Zygmunt et al., 2018). Zygmunt and colleagues (2018) described a program that paired predominantly White preservice teachers with community mentors from a historically Black neighborhood in Muncie, Indiana in order to examine how caring relationships between preservice teachers and community members inform preservice teachers' culturally responsive development. Data informing the case study included written reflective journals from 60 preservice teachers as well as focus groups held with community mentors. The authors describe the activities the preservice teachers participated in, such as touring the community, patronizing local businesses, and participating in service projects with their mentors. Additionally, they were encouraged to attend the local Baptist or African Methodist Episcopal church with their mentor. The preservice teacher participants cited this experience as helping them connect theory to practice, identify community assets, and develop a critical consciousness. Community

mentors also identified the partnership as productive, allowing them to "help develop the teachers *all* children need" (p. 135). Thus, the authors conclude that building relationships between community members and preservice teachers could serve to develop more culturally responsive teachers.

Similarly, Damrow and Sweeney's (2019) study also focused on pairing preservice teachers with someone with different experiences than their own in order to investigate how those interactions might inform preservice teachers' justice-oriented development. However, rather than reaching out to community members, teacher educators from a large predominantly White institution (PWI) in the midwestern United States created a partnership with an historically Black College/University (HBCU) over 1,000 miles away in the mid-Atlantic United States. Pairs of students (one from each university) met online to engage in discussion around a particular prompt relating to social justice teaching or current events. Following their paired discussions, all of the participants from both universities would engage in a conversation, again connected via video chat. The participants from the PWI found that the partnership brought "issues like Black Lives Matter and immigration closer" to their lives (p. 263). In this way, these spaces seemed to be particularly productive for some of the White preservice teachers, perhaps more so than they were for the preservice teachers enrolled at the HBCU. Damrow and Sweeney ultimately recognized that the learning that took place over the course of the study was more fruitful for the students at the PWI. However, they concluded that using technology to facilitate conversations between preservice teachers in different settings with differing experience could serve as an affordable and high-impact method to facilitate meaningful learning about issues of systemic injustice.

In another study which paired preservice teachers with others to expand their thinking about justice, Riley and Solic (2017) described a teacher residency program where preservice teachers connected with "teacher activists" in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Their goal in studying this partnership was to examine how engagement with activists during a teacher preparation program might facilitate transformative learning regarding urban contexts and social justice teaching. During their residency program the participants attended one teacher inquiry meeting focused on teaching racial justice as well as two full-day conferences centered around educational transformation. The preservice teachers then had six on-campus meetings with their instructors to process the experiences that came up in the meetings and conferences. To study the impact of these interactions, Riley and Solic analyzed audio recordings of on-campus meetings, two semi-structured interviews with each of the seven participants, and artifacts from conferences the participants' attended. The preservice teachers described the course as "opening their eyes" (p. 185) and allowing them to see "previously invisible systems that impact students" (p. 186). Additionally, the participants described a renewed interest in enrolling in courses to learn, rather than just to fulfill requirements. As a result, the researchers conclude that engagement with teacher activists was productive for the preservice teachers and could serve as a productive model for other teacher education programs that seek to engage preservice teachers in justice-oriented work.

The preservice teacher participants in Land's (2018) study were paired with master's students who served as their mentor teachers in the field to consider how conversations that critically reflected on power might facilitate the development of critical, socially just preservice teachers. During the study, the master's students were

enrolled in a course about critical discourse analysis and structures of power in classrooms located at a large university in the southwestern United States. Each master's student conducted videotaped observations of the preservice teachers, and they watched and analyzed the videos together using critical discourse analysis in order to facilitate discussions of how power functioned in the classroom. Researchers then analyzed the field notes, audio and video recordings of coaching conversations, and reflections on those conversations. While the researcher found the practice of the observations to be productive, in that it allowed mentors and preservice teachers to focus on particular moments and dynamics in the classroom, not all conversations explored broader issues of power. Thus, the assignment was not as effective as it could have been for altering participants' dispositions toward justice.

The current literature on interventions in justice-oriented teacher education that I describe above seems to be a rapidly-expanding genre of work in the field. It is certainly impressive to read about the work that these teacher educators are doing, the creative collaborations they are developing, and the commitment they have to creating more just futures in schools. For this reason, it feels important to note here that the critiques I offer below are in no way critiques of these committed and innovative teacher educators. Instead, I am interested in the ways that justice-oriented teaching, learning, and research have been conceptualized more broadly, and propose that researchers and teacher educators might ask different questions about teaching and learning. More specifically, they must ask different questions about teaching and learning toward justice, in the hopes that such questions might open up new and valuable paths for knowledge-building and understanding.

Graduates of Justice-Oriented Teacher Preparation Programs

A small body of literature exists studying graduates of justice-oriented teacher education programs. While these studies might be more difficult to complete, given the fact that graduates may move to teach in locations geographically removed from their teacher education programs, such research stands to offer a great deal to the field of justice-oriented teacher education. For instance, Athanases and Oliveira (2007) studied how graduates from a justice-oriented teacher education program located in California were prepared to advocate for marginalized and vulnerable students during their first year of teaching. They analyzed documents from the teacher education program, including syllabi, artifacts, interviews, and portfolios and also conducted focus groups with graduates of the program directly relating to how the graduates felt their program prepared them (or did not prepare them) to advocate for equity in their schools. Findings indicated that overall, the graduates did advocate for equity in their school settings, but they felt vulnerable to confrontation in doing so. The researchers conclude that these confrontations are unavoidable in advocating for justice work in schools and thus teacher education programs must strengthen preservice teachers' organizational literacy to better understand how their voices can be best used to advocate for change in school settings.

Other studies of graduates of justice-oriented teacher education programs note inconsistency in the graduates' enactment of justice-oriented teaching practices. One example of such studies comes from Whipp (2013) who studied how twelve graduates of a justice-oriented teacher preparation program at a mid-sized Catholic university in the midwestern United States described their teaching goals, influences, and practices after their first-year teaching. Whipp found that the teachers fell into two general categories:

those who were individually oriented focused on building colorblind caring relationships with their students, while those who were structurally oriented focused on consciousness-raising and advocacy. The author concluded that the most powerful influences on whether teachers became individually or structurally oriented seemed to be cross-cultural experiences, and the dynamics of their individual field experiences that challenged previous thinking, and support during the first year teaching.

Similarly, Kelly and Brandes (2010) found complicated impacts of the justice-oriented teacher preparation program they studied. They interviewed alumni of a justice-oriented teacher preparation program after they began their teaching careers. While the graduates acknowledged teaching for justice as important, they also stated that they did not feel they were living up to the expectations for justice-oriented teaching from their teacher education program. The authors stated that this disconnect seemed to be the result of resistance from students, colleagues, and administrators as well as rigid accountability measures. Kelly and Brandes then offered the participants' feedback that justice-oriented teacher education programs must provide preservice teachers with more practical tools for implementing anti-oppressive education in their classrooms.

The overwhelming argument made by scholars of such research is that interventions do not lead to a consistent stream of graduates of teacher education programs who are capable of and prepared to enact justice-oriented teaching in their classrooms. Rather, these studies point to inconsistent or ineffective interventions, with many teachers leaving the course, assignment, or program without adopting justice-oriented dispositions or without being able to translate those dispositions into teaching practices. As a result, the conversations around justice-oriented teacher preparation often

turn to focusing on pinpointing the *right* kind of teacher candidate to recruit into such programs. However, as demonstrated in some of the studies of graduates of these programs, even those who left their programs prepared to enact justice oriented work often felt disappointed in how they were able to translate that preparation into their classroom practice (e.g. Kelly & Brandes, 2010). In the remainder of this literature review, I will offer my critiques of these types of intervention studies before offering some examples of more productive ways to think about and engage research on justice-oriented teacher preparation.

Limitations of the Research on Dispositions and Interventions

The studies I described above compose only a small portion of the literature on justice-oriented teacher education. However, they are representative of the logics rooted in linear, humanist ideas of learning and intervention, which undergird the majority of research in the field. In this dissertation, I argue, like the writers of *The Book of Antecedents*, that what is needed in justice-oriented teacher education is research and scholarship that is "becoming more like life" (Foer, 2002, p. 196). In order for the research to become more life-like, I suggest that teacher educators and educational researchers engage with both the complexity of the concept of justice and the embeddedness of conversations around justice in multiple, competing sociopolitical discourses.

Pittard (2015) conducted a literature review of studies related to critical pedagogy to examine in what ways those studies positioned the preservice teacher participants. What she found was that the vast majority of studies position preservice teachers as

flawed and needing transformation, which may be enacted through one of the intervention approaches outlined above. Research that positions preservice teachers as in need of transformation echoes legacies of humanism in social science research. Often, justice-oriented interventions, such as courses, assignments, or community experiences, are designed by teacher educators and the efficacy of the interventions is determined based on evaluations of preservice teachers after the intervention, either through surveys (e.g. Bautista et al., 2018), interviews (e.g. Damrow & Sweeney, 2019), or written assignments (e.g. Reagan et al., 2016). A significant limitation of this work is that it paints teaching and learning as simple tasks of information exchange. In this line of thinking, assignments, courses, and experiences which do not produce the desired results could be deemed as ineffective or somehow flawed. The response to these perceptions of failure could manifest in a move to adopt deficit views of preservice teachers as incapable of doing justice-oriented work with some scholars even going so far as to say that teacher education programs should recognize that certain populations of preservice teachers will never be able to do justice work and should not be admitted to teacher education programs (e.g. Garmon, 2004; Mills, 2012; Bautista et al., 2018). Alternatively, other scholars have argued that these inconsistent results indicate that teacher education is ultimately an ineffective intervention (Strauss, 2014). Pittard argues (and I echo), that instead of falling into this trap of success/failure,

> it is instead more important to focus our attention on the multiple and complex reasons that pre-service teachers may not implement equity-focused pedagogy and activism so that we might – in the limited time we do have with them – assist

> them in exploring these reasons for resistance more thoroughly with them rather than making assumptions about their perceived resistance for them. (2015, p. 334)

This approach stands to be more effective in that it acknowledges the complex positioning of preservice teachers among competing discourses.

Another noteworthy characteristic of many existing studies of justice-oriented teacher education is their reliance on language for essential certainty about what preservice teachers know, think, and will do. Humanist work relies on a strict belief in the clear correspondence between a word and things in the world (St.Pierre, 2000), and on the words of individuals being accurate representations of their thoughts and perceptions (Talja, 1999). This belief in the accuracy of language becomes particularly problematic when one contradicts oneself in speech, a remarkably common occurrence (Talja, 1999). Rather than viewing these contradictions or tensions as signs of failings or confusion of participants, it would be more fruitful to see them as indicative of the ways in which people are embedded in already existing discourses for making sense of the world (Bakhtin, 1981). In what follows, I highlight a few studies which I find promising in their engagement of complexity and multiplicity. Then, I will describe how I see this project as contributing to this line of inquiry.

Multiple Justices and Broader Discourses

While a great deal of educational research related to justice is rooted in linear, cause-and-effect paradigms that I argue are not realistic, there are a number of studies that engage the complexity of teaching and learning. Two categories of studies are

particularly relevant to this project: those which explore multiple ideas of justice and those which situate justice-oriented teacher education in broader discourses.

Multiple Ideas of Justice

To begin, I draw attention to some of the limited studies that have acknowledged the existence of multiple ideas of justice and sought to identify how individuals align themselves among those multiple ideas. For instance, Sandretto et al. (2007) designed a study in which teacher educators participated in learning communities centered around what justice means in teacher education. In the study, two groups of teacher educators (one on New Zealand's North Island and one on the South Island) met over the course of a year and a half to puzzle together around their beliefs and practices related to social justice teacher education. The researchers read through the transcripts of the meetings many times and examined different relevant bodies of literature, ranging from political theory to teacher education to their local New Zealand history, to consider different discourses from those spaces which might be circulating in the transcript texts. They did not code the data one way and leave it but reconsidered it in different ways informed by different bodies of knowledge. From this work, the researchers found that the teacher educators defined social justice in varied ways rooted in either democratic responsibility, professional responsibility, bicultural responsibility, or paternalistic responsibility. This disparity in definitions had significant implications for the work these teacher educators did around social justice and engaging in discourse analysis allowed the researchers to recognize and trouble those differences.

Dover (2013) approached studying varied definitions of justice in education somewhat differently. In her study, she examined how English Language Arts teachers in multiple states conceptualized and implemented teaching for social justice. Participants completed a questionnaire that asked them to describe teaching for social justice, discuss how they incorporated social justice into standards-based curriculum, and what challenges they encountered in teaching for social justice. Dover found that the teachers called upon multiple conceptual frameworks in describing justice-oriented teaching. For example, they seemed to cite ideas of democratic education relating to civic responsibility, ideas of critical pedagogy in promoting critical consciousness, and ideas of multicultural education in creating a diverse curriculum. Thus, she concluded that these differing movements in justice-oriented education did have meaningful impacts on educators working in classrooms.

These two studies that consider how preservice teachers position themselves among the numerous significations of justice are valuable in that they begin to illustrate the complex landscapes of justice in education. However, these researchers, like those I described above, also limit their findings to participants' particular experiences within the education context without considering what additional ideas or powers from outside education might be shaping participants' responses. Further, they seem to define the participants' conceptualizations of justice as static rather than dynamic. Given the situatedness of teachers and schools in broader political and ideological discourses, I argue that it is imperative that researchers do not attempt to study ideas around justice in a vacuum (i.e., only in education contexts), removed from other forces that may be

influencing preservice teachers, but rather examine how teachers are always already positioned in broader sociopolitical landscapes.

Situating Justice Among Broader Discourses

Relatively little work has been done that situates educators' stances toward justice-work within larger issues and narratives in the world outside of education. One study that aptly addresses this need is from Phillips and Larson (2012) who examined the interactions between "macro" and "micro" discourses, that is, between discourses circulating in more public spaces, such as the media, and those articulated by preservice teachers or teacher educators. They engaged with two distinct kinds of data in their work on how heteronormative discourses circulate in preservice teacher education. First, they pulled 60 newspaper articles from a local newspaper that described incidents where teachers faced disciplinary action (including suspension and dismissal) from school boards and administrations as a result of advocating for the inclusion of books or plays featuring LGBTQ+ characters. The authors identified two macro discourses, that of "the Martyred (unemployed) teacher" and the "Silent (Employed) teacher" (p. 163). They then analyzed preservice teachers' assignments relating to teaching books that push back against heteronormativity to see whether and how these "macro" discourses were made evident. In this analysis, the researchers recognized the limitations of their own understanding of the contemporary discursive production of teachers relating to LGBTQ+ issues and the ways in which the assignments and discussions the researchers had in their own teacher education courses ignored the very public and lived binary of "the Martyred (unemployed) teacher" and the "Silent (Employed) teacher" (p. 163). Studies like this suggest a space for investigating the numerous and varied ways that narratives about

schooling, equity, success, and justice might be complicating the way that teachers respond to the ideas about justice presented in teacher education courses and professional learning.

Positioning the Dissertation Project

I conceptualized this dissertation project largely in response to tendencies I noticed in the existing empirical research on justice-oriented teacher education. The empirical research under-acknowledges the messiness and multiplicity present in the theoretical work, typically not considering the many ways of thinking about and conceptualizing justice that preservice teachers may have been exposed to in schooling environments, much less the ideas about and responses to ideas of justice that circulate *outside* of school spaces. Further, the empirical literature represents an over-concern with pinning down and assessing preservice teachers' thinking about or dispositions toward justice-oriented work. This assessment is often coupled with assignments, programs, or courses that are designed as interventions to "fix" what is wrong with preservice teachers' attitudes toward justice before sending them off into their own classrooms. I argue that focusing on whether or not teachers "get it" reinforces a linear conception of teaching and learning as simple, manageable, measurable tasks that does not represent the realities and messiness of the pedagogical exchange.

In this dissertation, I respond to these critiques in the following ways. First, the research questions which guide my project, *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of justice operating in schools? What discourses do they call upon in responding?,* explicitly acknowledge the fact that multiple conceptualizations of justice are always circulating. I am not seeking to assess

whether or not my participants came to the *right* understanding of justice, but rather to listen to and illustrate the differing ways of thinking about justice that surfaced in their speech over the course of their first year teaching. Additionally, while all of these teachers graduated from the same teacher education program, I conceptualize the teacher education program not as an intervening force that should silence all uncertainties and tensions around justice-oriented work, but rather as one voice among the many that these teachers are calling upon as they think about and enact their practice. In this way, I am not interested in the teachers' linear development toward a particular way of thinking, being, or acting. Instead, I am focused on how these teachers are positioned among competing ideas in a particular sociocultural context.

At the end of their review of empirical literature related to justice-oriented teacher education, Mills and Ballantyne (2016) argued that the existing field of justice-oriented teacher education research is flawed because it is composed primarily of small, qualitative studies rather than large, generalizable quantitative studies. This narrative is repeated in many spaces – a need for more assessment, more data, a need to simplify so that we might understand. What I argue in this project is precisely the opposite: that simplifying and reducing is not a path to understanding. Instead, I echo the work of qualitative researchers who assert that "predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224). The study of justice, marginalization, and oppression and the possibilities for teachers in response to those phenomena is a profoundly human affair, bound up in human language, ideas, and logics. Thus, the research that is needed in the face of great injustice is not research that flattens out the complexity of the experiences of preservice and fully-employed teachers, but

rather research that makes its way into that complexity. Like the authors of *The Book of Antecedents,* my task in this project is not to create a narrative, but to create a text that is expansive, non-linear, messy, and contradictory, always "becoming more like life" (Foer, 2002, p. 196).

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORY AND METHODS

"What am I to myself
that must be remembered,
insisted upon
so often?"

(Creeley, 2008, p. 75)

When I was in college I worked for a while at the university library. My job was in the collection development department and mostly involved sourcing and pricing books that faculty wanted to add to the library and then ordering those books. Knowing I loved poetry, one fall my supervisors assigned me to assist on a special project. The University had recently acquired the personal library of the poet Robert Creeley,[19] and I was to help catalog the ephemera, the items found in the collection that were not books. The task was to fit a large quantity of seemingly random items into a logical organizational schema, tag them, place them in plastic sheets inside a binder, and record

[19] Robert Creeley was a poet. He taught at Black Mountain College in the late 1950s and eventually moved to San Francisco where he became associated with the Beat poets. He is an important literary figure because his work connects these two influential groups of poets who were writing thousands of miles away from one another. The Beats are considered one of the clearest manifestations of postmodernism in literature, thus linking Creeley and their work to my own poststructural project in this dissertation. I like to think he would have laughed as he watched a group of college workers clumsily trying to tie a tag with a catalog number to his feather. Further, I see the excerpt from Creeley's poem "The Rain," that opens this chapter to be a fitting introduction for thinking about the discursive subject who is created, insisted upon again and again as powerful discourses operate upon them.

each in the tiny cells of a spreadsheet. The ephemera[20] included letters, hastily scrawled postcards, appointment reminders, business cards for dry cleaning companies, and, I will always remember, a large gray feather that had been shut inside one of the books. The feather was a problem. It did not fit within the organizational schema. The tag would not stay affixed. It did not fit between the sheets of plastic in the binder. Its description in the spreadsheet? *Feather, large*. There was no way to contextualize it into the life of Robert Creeley. It could have been a precious treasure or nothing. It frustrated the others working on the project with me – what did it mean to have a piece of data that resisted narrative? What would become of the project? The schema? The stories we told each other?

I have thought about the feather a lot as I have come to learn more and more about research during my doctoral studies. I have thought of those static-y plastic binder sheets and the tiny cells of the spreadsheet as the trappings of positivism, the ways that we want there to be order to the world, to the data, to the story to be told. And then the feather: the big visceral reminder that those orderly schemata will always fall apart, always fail to capture the messiness of experience in the world.

My goal in this dissertation project has never been to define what justice should be in schools[21] or to prescribe a program that will guarantee that graduates of teacher education programs will embody justice orientations in their work[22]. Instead, I sought to

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[20] In case anyone happens to be interested, there is an available online catalog of some of the ephemera. It can be accessed via the Notre Dame University Library. However, because the feather was found inside of a book it is not included in this database. You'll have to travel to Indiana to see it in person.

[21] Although, of course, I do have my own thoughts about this. See Footnote 7.

[22] Although, of course, that would be nice

gain insight into the ways that teachers' experiences of justice-oriented teacher education and justice-oriented teaching exist in complicated ways by asking the questions: *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of justice operating in schools? What discourses do they call upon in responding?* Further, I aimed to upset developmentalist notions of becoming, teaching, and learning that seem all too common in the research on teacher education. By contrast, I considered how teachers' ways of talking about and enacting justice in the classroom are not merely a product of successful or failed teacher education programs. Rather, they are always already "brush[ing] up against thousands of living dialogic threads" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 277) which teacher educators must work to acknowledge and grapple with. It is my hope that through this dissertation I will be able to articulate some of the intricate and competing pressures that surround teachers in the present moment.

While writing this chapter I found myself, again, caught up in dissertation conventions. Specifically, I wrestled with whether the theory and methods should be divided into two shorter chapters. However, in his writing about poststructural modes of discourse analysis, Threadgold (2000) reminds his readers that "the binary separation of metalanguage (or theory) and data (that which is given to be observed or analyzed) is already an impossible separation" (p. 40). In other words, one cannot separate the way one theorizes from the way one engages with the data, the two are informed by one another. So, instead, I offer a single chapter as a means of describing the ways I will think about and interact with the data in this project, knowing that theory and methods cannot be divorced.

In this chapter, I will begin by describing one aspect of the poststructural project. Then, I will outline Foucault's conceptualization of the subject and explain how this conceptualization differs from dominant narratives in teacher education research. After discussing the concept of discourse, I will describe several Bakhtinian concepts around language that facilitate my investigations of discourse in this project. Next, I situate my project in the work of those educational scholars who have engaged poststructural thinking in their research. Finally, I will outline the specific methods I used to approach the data collection and analysis in this dissertation project.

Thinking Poststructurally

> *The work of an intellectual is not to shape others' political will; it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblematization (in which he carries out his specific tasks an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as citizen to play). (Foucault, 1988, p. 265)*

In this excerpt, Foucault (1988) remarked that he saw the work of scholars as primarily concerned with questioning that which is taken as common sense and to unsettle ways of thinking that are comfortable and well-worn. This assertion reflects one of the most basic aims of the poststructural project, which is to "allo[w] us to think beyond dualisms as inevitable" (Davies, 2003, p. xiii) by interrogating the ways that categories and ways of being and knowing are created and maintained by particular

linguistic moves. In other words, one crucial task of the poststructural project is to identify and push back against logics and ways of thinking about the world in order to see how they are socially constructed and maintained through language. While this broad commitment is a thread that connects the many scholars who are considered poststructuralist, the particularities of the work done by different scholars who are labeled poststructuralist tends to vary widely. Thus, there is significant disagreement about which scholars are and are not considered poststructural, especially since many of the theorists who are often defined as poststructural or postmodern articulate divergent views and arguments (Butler, 1992). For this reason, after situating poststructural thinking in the broader field of research on education for justice, I will focus my attention on the work of two poststructural theorists, Foucault and Bakhtin, and particularly on their work in discourse and language to guide the remainder of my project.

Situating this project in the poststructural paradigm means that my dissertation research differs from a large quantity of the work being conducted on justice in education. Most often, justice-oriented educational research is situated in critical theories and methodologies that propose an emancipatory vision, often with clearly defined milestones and goals (St. Pierre, 2000). By contrast, the poststructural project does not offer "grand promises of permanent empowerment and liberation. [But rather] more tenuous guarantees of constant destabilization and critique" (Prasad, 2015, p. 270). In other words, this is not work that will outline how we can get all teachers to become flawless, justice-oriented educators but will instead offer alternate ways of thinking about what it means to be and become justice-oriented in teacher education by unraveling some dominant narratives around teaching, learning, and justice. To consider justice

poststructurally is not to seek particular ends or particular relations of power, but rather to "emphasize the partiality of any approach to challenging oppression, and the need to constantly rework these approaches" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 4), recognizing that relationships of oppression are produced by citing harmful discourses again and again (Butler, 1997; Kumashiro, 2000; Walkerdine, 1990).

Poststructural theories are, at times, criticized for resting in a theoretical space that is concerned primarily with discourse and too far removed from lived experiences (Wang, 2013). However, I argue that the opposite is true. The concern with discourse matters because of the way language shapes lived experience and the material world. As I am writing this dissertation in Fall 2021, a school administrator in Texas has come under fire for suggesting the need for teachers to teach *both sides* of the Holocaust (Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2021). That statement was thinkable and possible for her to say because of recent Texas legislation that insists that opposing viewpoints on potentially sensitive issues be included in schools. The administrator's statement highlighted particular powerful voices and reproduced particular relations of power. At a recent school board meeting, current and former students from that school district articulated the ways in which the administrator's words, inextricably linked to the state policy, produced real, lived oppression in their lives. Of course, language matters. Discourse matters. Thus, before proceeding, it seems necessary to elaborate on precisely how I will be taking up the concept of discourse in this dissertation through the work of Foucault and Bakhtin.

Discourse

In this study, I talk back to work which has sought to "render down the complexity" (MacLure, 2003) of justice in education by forcing simplicity and linearity

onto justice-oriented teacher education research and to instead explore the messy amalgamation of language and power in which preservice teachers are always already participating. The Foucauldian conception of discourse and the discursive construction of subjects offers a way to name and think through the messiness. For poststructural theorists informed by Foucault (1978, 1988), discourse is a concept which goes beyond language as a tool to represent meaning. Instead, discourses are "functions of power" (Bové, 1995, p.58) which are both "productive and disabling" (MacLure, 2003, p. 3) and situate subjects in particular power/knowledge relations (Weedon, 1987). This means that discourses form the ways in which we understand, value, and privilege ways of knowing and being. Certain ways of thinking or orientations become privileged as "natural" or "common sense" (Kumashiro, 2000), which means that others are cast out as unthinkable. Foucault (1970) offered the example of Gregor Mendel, whose discovery of genetics in peas was ignored by the scientific community because it did not adhere to the discourses that bounded scientific knowledge at that time. Importantly, Foucault acknowledged that discourses are not agreed upon and disseminated by powerful individuals in intentional ways. Instead, he wrote that they are

> both reinforced and renewed by whole strata of practices, such as pedagogy, of course, and the system of books, publishing, libraries; learned societies in the past and laboratories now. But it is also renewed, no doubt more profoundly, by the way in which knowledge is put to work, valorised, distributed, and in a sense attributed, in a society. (Foucault, 1970, p. 55)

In other words, particular logics and discourses become powerful because they are taken up and repeated in multiple spheres in varying ways. In education, for instance, the idea

that standardized test scores are a meaningful metric of student learning and achievement has been repeatedly emphasized through educational policies, curriculum design, test-making corporations, and college admissions systems that prioritize standardized test scores. In this way, the power of discourse is not centralized, but courses through numerous institutions to influence how success in school is characterized.

Additionally, scholars influenced by Foucault's concept of discourse posit that discourses are materially productive (Bové, 1995) and "form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 54). For instance, Britzman (2012) asserted that dominant discourses about what it means to be a teacher, one who is authoritative and clear, marginalize conversations about the uncertainty and unknowability that is inherent in teaching. Similarly, Walkerdine (1990) and Kumashiro (2000) argued that oppression in schools is fundamentally a product of repeating harmful histories and "citing...particular discourses which frame how people think, feel, act, and interact" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 41). The powers of these repeated histories can be seen in the persistent labeling of Black students as aggressive (Young, 2016), or the insistence that wage-poor parents do not care about their children's education (Gorski, 2008). Naming and tracing particular discourses in justice-oriented education could inform how and why oppressive ways of thinking and acting in schools perpetuate despite the prevalence of voiced commitments to justice (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). Further, Davies (2003) noted that attention to discourse can not only illustrate the absences and limitations embedded in the way things are but can also "potentiate individual action" (p. xii). For the purposes of this inquiry, this means that the way teachers talk about justice, and the discourses they call upon in doing so could be linked to the ways they will proceed to act in classrooms with children.

Thus, considering discourse in educational spaces could lead to meaningful disruptions of powerful discourses that could directly impact the ways that teachers interact with students in the classroom.

Disrupting accepted ways of knowing and considering the material consequences of language opens a field of radical possibilities born of research in discourse (Davis, 2004). Davies (2003) outlined the possibilities of engaging in poststructuralist thinking in empirical research. She wrote:

> One liberating aspect of poststructuralist thought is that it allows me to recognize the multiple discourses in which I participate and to see myself differently constituted through each of them. It allows me to imagine a discourse in which I can position myself as neither male nor female. It also allows me to see fully, for the first time, the extent of my entrapment in known discourses…More importantly, it allows me to focus on the contradictions in my experience, not as failures of rational thought, but as the creative source of new understanding, new discourses. (p. 165)

Said differently, working with discourse makes visible the ways that subjects are bound up in discourses that have been circulating and illustrates the limitations that result from the constraints of those discourses. In this dissertation project, I followed the path Davies described: to focus on the contradictions in the experiences of the participants in the study in order to create a space for new or different understanding. In analyzing my participant's language, I again and again ran into places where they contradict themselves, where their thinking appears nonlinear, where no summarizing narrative can neatly articulate what is happening in their talk. The feather in the stack of postcards and

letters. If I were looking to create coherent pictures of my participants as individuals following clear developmental progressions toward being justice-oriented teachers, I would be frustrated by these aporia[23]. I might blame their teacher education program for failing to train them appropriately; I might psychologize them as somehow troubled; I might see them as unsuccessful in their work. Instead, informed by the work of Foucault on discourse, I treat these tensions and contradictions as important windows into the ways teachers are positioned as subjects and pressured by numerous discursive forces. In the following section I will elaborate on Foucault's conceptualization of the subject and what it makes possible in this research.

The Subject

An exploration of discourse in the Foucauldian tradition is not possible without a discussion of the subject and a consideration of how the subject produced of discourse differs from a rational, unified, enlightenment subject. Foucault (1982) defined his own work as a project in the history of the different ways human beings have been made subjects. What this means is that he studied the ways that different institutions, traditions, and ideas act upon individuals to shape them in different ways. In this theorization, there is no essential, stable self that is inherent to one's being. Instead, subjects occupy a set of positions that are made possible by a particular interaction of time, place, and power.

Thus, explorations of discourse do not seek to understand subjects' motivations or to make assumptions about the speaking subject based on their words. Scholars who work

[23] The idea of *aporia* in analysis of discourse is often linked to Derrida. Tobin (1995) summarizes aporia as "the moment where the text transgresses its laws and begins to unravel" (p. 233). Moments where the text defies logic or begins to unravel are often meaningful spaces to begin considering how discourses might be shaping the language at hand.

in Foucauldian discourse look to understand the conditions which make it possible to say only certain things and not others (St. Pierre, 2000), or to conceptualize justice in some particular way and not in another. The author, or speaker, of that text cannot be read as a coherent, unified individual (Foucault, 1994). Instead, they can be read as ways to observe the "historically, socially, and institutionally specific nature of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988, p. 379). Said differently, the words and texts created by individual subjects are not to be read as insights into who that person is, but rather as insights into the particular contexts in which they exist and the way those contexts are constituting them as particular kinds of subjects.

Further, it is important to note that in this type of work subjects do not belong to any essential categories, but rather are formed by the ways particular discourses circulate. In other words, we cannot say that a participant articulates a particular statement because they are a woman. Instead, we could say that the participant may express that sentiment because discourses around womanhood and femininity have positioned them in certain ways. This shaping is constantly shifting and context specific, meaning that subjects may occupy certain positions in one setting (such as a preservice teacher operating as a student in their teacher education coursework) and different positions in other settings (such as a preservice teacher who is acting as an authoritative teacher in their field placement) (Foucault, 1978; St. Pierre, 2000). While particular discourses may more readily ascribe themselves to particular bodies, there is no essential categorization of subjects in poststructural theory (Lather, 1991). Thus, while many dissertations allude to participants' identities throughout the analysis process (e.g., another participant who identified as a White woman said…), those identities will not play a major role in my

analysis. It is crucial here to note that I am not dismissing the power that identity categories and our experiences of belonging to those categories hold. Poststructural work has been, at times, critiqued for this type of dismissal (Lather, 1991). Rather, I am pointing out that within a poststructural project, the task not seeking to figure out what it means to belong to a particular identity category. Instead, poststructural work is concerned with opening those categories up and refashioning them as in flux, contextually specific, and as productions of discourse that have real, material, and sociopolitical impacts.

The idea of the Foucauldian subject is powerful in research precisely because it strays away from ways of thinking about the self that are common sense and comfortable to us. It allows us to consider the ways that large forces and ideas influence everything about individual existence in the world. It illustrates the depth of our embeddedness in ideas, logics, and histories that we did not originate. Specifically, I argue that research that engages the Foucauldian subject is crucial to considerations of justice, especially in education. Although significant pressure is placed on teachers to individually be able to right systemic injustices, considering the complex embedment of teachers and learners in multiple larger and non-linear narratives helps researchers and teacher educators to understand the impossible positioning of teachers in this work as well as the many instances in which promises for a more just education have been made and ultimately not fulfilled.

Bakhtin

While Bakhtin (1981) was writing in the early 20th century, years before Foucault, because of the political conditions in which he lived (first in the Russian

Empire and then in exile in Kazakhstan and Mordovia) his most influential works were not published or popularized until after his death in 1975. However, despite the fact that the two theorists' work was never in direct dialogue with one another, their ideas around language and the functioning of discourse share many common themes, including the idea that all language is reflective of the larger histories and narratives of power in which it is embedded. Threadgold (2000) went so far as to say that "Foucault's conception of discourse is not unlike Bakhtin's much earlier notions of dialogism and heteroglossia" (p. 49). While the underlying assumptions of these two theorists bear similarities, the particular ways they write about their ideas and the particular ways that they have been taken up by researchers differ.

Bakhtin (1981;1990), who was a literary theorist, defined several terms and concepts that are helpful in understanding and analyzing discourses. For this reason, while my dissertation is motivated by Foucault's theorization of the subject and discourse, much of the analytic work comes out of a Bakhtinian tradition. One reason for this is because while much of the research which has emerged from Foucault's work is concerned with written text and documents, there is a significant precedent for Bakhtinian tools being taken up to analyze spoken language, and thus these tools are appropriate for this project (e.g. White, 2017, 2021; Yagata, 2017). Additionally, while Foucault's work provides a theoretical grounding for this work, Bakhtin describes specific tools and terms that are useful in outlining how the analysis of discourse takes place. In what follows, I outline Bakhtin's ideas of heteroglossia and authoritative discourse as ways into thinking about the data in this project.

Heteroglossia

Like Foucault (1978;1988), Bakhtin (1981; 1990) did not see language as something that could provide insight into the mind of an individual. Instead, he conceptualized language as heteroglossia, or many-voiced. He wrote that,

> all verbal discourse is a social phenomenon – social throughout its entire range and in each of its factors from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning (1981, p. 259).

Said differently, the words that individuals take up are always already connected to a much broader network of language and meaning, and it is only possible for an individual to speak or write with particular words because they are made available in that historical, geographic, and social context. Thus, an analysis of language and speech can be an especially useful way to characterize the tensions, ideas, and anxieties of a cultural moment.

The heteroglossic nature of language is not only significant because it allows us to make observations about specific contexts, but also because it "strives to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343). In other words, the language that is available to us does not only shape basic, factual understandings but also determines the values, ideologies, and ontologies that are available to us. Thus, the ways that teachers talk about justice is not necessarily reflective of their unique, personal ideas about what is just in schools, but instead is the result of the ways of thinking and acting around justice that have been made available through powerful discourses. In my analysis, I will gesture

toward the ways that powerful ideas about teaching and learning shape the ideological commitments and behaviors of the participant teachers.

Authoritative Discourse

In analyzing discourse, Bakhtin's (1981, 1990) notion of authoritative discourse is an important conceptual analytic tool to identify discourses and conceptualize how they are functioning in specific settings. Bakhtin asserted that “each word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.” In other words, all utterances (spoken or written) are the result of an ongoing social dialogue that encompasses all language. Within this dialogue, some discourses become regarded as authoritative, meaning that they are “connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher,” (1981, p. 342). In his writings, Bakhtin describes forces such as religion, government, and education as the sources of many authoritative discourses. However, over time, scholars have cited other sources as disseminators of authoritative discourse, such as traditional media. Authoritative discourses are considered unarguable and concrete, meaning that they are taken as incontrovertible truths. Identifying authoritative discourse within a text can provide important insight into which groups and organizations are positioned as powerful. In my analysis, I argue that in educational spaces, additional authoritative discourses, such as curriculum and parent approval, are incredibly powerful in shaping the way that teachers speak and act.

While there have been studies relating to authoritative focused on students and teachers (Skidmore & Murakami, 2010), in student teaching (Yagata, 2017), and with regard to online news media (Meddaugh, 2010), no studies have explored how authoritative concepts shape preservice teachers’ language about justice.

For this reason, ideas around discourse, with a particular focus on Bakhtin's authoritative discourse, can provide valuable insight into both the concepts of justice which are operating in the specific school spaces which participants occupy and also what additional discourses the participants call upon in discussing issues of justice in education.

Important Critiques

It is imperative that I acknowledge that these theorists, Foucault and Bakhtin, were White, European men, and thus my using their work perpetuates the legacy of employing Western philosophies and in calling on White men as authorities. Specifically, poststructural work has often been critiqued because it asserted "the death of the subject" just at the historical moment when women and people of color were beginning to gain expanded rights and voice (Lather, 1991). While I recognize this historical critique and the overrepresentations of White, European men in scholarly texts, and I believe heartily in listening to and calling upon the voices of scholars from historically marginalized populations, I argue that the interrogations of justice-oriented teacher education and justice-oriented teaching opened up by my engagement with Foucault and Bakhtin matter and could meaningfully contribute to opening new spaces of possibility for understanding and pursuing more just futures for young people.

Poststructural Theorization Toward Justice

Additionally, I take up the work of Foucault and Bakhtin as mediated through feminist and anti-oppressive scholars such as Maggie MacLure (2003) and Kevin Kumashiro (2000). The work of these scholars, which I will describe below, is directly

connected to using poststructural thinking and thinking around discourse to interrupt the perpetuation of oppressive narratives in educational spaces, specifically.

Feminist Engagements: MacLure

MacLure's (2003) *Discourse in Educational and Social Research* has been a particularly important guiding text for this project. In the book, MacLure described the importance of doing work that interrogates text and traces what this work stands to offer educational research, feminist research, and interview-based research, among other topics. Below, I will trace some of these arguments as they relate to my project.

What Discourse Analysis Could Mean for Educational Research. MacLure (2003) wrote about the need for research that pushes back against the tendency to simplify and narrativize, especially in the current educational context. She described educational policy as "obsessed with clarity, certainty, and transparency" (p. 169). I would argue that this obsession extends beyond just policy makers; the culture of accountability in education has extended to include other stakeholders as well, as community members, caretakers, and others who fixate on what the assessments and statistics attached to particular schools and particular students mean – how they determine worth, how they allocate money, and how they predict future achievement. As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the globe, as students sat in their homes, perhaps surrounded by sick family members, perhaps without access to nutritious food as jobs had been lost, there was a stream of news stories and articles asking the same question: how will we keep students from falling behind? What will all of this mean for the statistics?

For the numbers? For the measurements? (Barnum, 2021; Clarke, 2021; Tygami & Peebles, 2021).

The power of research on discourse is that it can call powerful ideas, like the desire for clarity into question. MacLure (2003) wrote the following about the current state of educational policy and research and what analysis of discourse could offer:

> If there is a politics of deconstruction that could animate research, it would involve resisting the rage for clarity and closure emanating from policy and pedagogy. It would mean trying to open up the space of education against the dead-weight of given-ness that shuts it off. At the least, it would mean thinking twice, and more slowly, about the demands from policy makers to make research 'relevant' and 'accessible' (p. 170).

In other words, researching discourse allows us to push back against dominant narratives that flatten both the experiences of teaching and learning, *and* the individuals involved in teaching and learning into computational, transactional figures. Decades of policies which have pushed more and more accountability, restriction, and uniformity have not yet been successful in achieving the transformational education which facilitates student success toward which they aspire. Perhaps, then, instead of questioning the abilities of teachers and learners, it is more prudent to question the logics which we imagine as underlying teaching and learning to begin with.

This project responds to this call to resist the rage for clarity. Instead of assuming that teachers are not enacting justice-oriented teaching because of failures of their teacher education program or because they are uncommitted to the cause, I inquired into the complex webs of pressures and ideas in which they are situated.

What Discourse Analysis Could Mean for Feminist Research. Within educational research, discourse analysis offers the possibility to move toward more just ways of being and knowing. MacLure (2003) specifically described what this work could offer feminism. Too often, she argued, women's voices are taken as simple and sincere, lacking complexity and depth. She outlined the ways that women's writing is often read as confessional and personal, lacking meaning and applicability to broader conversations. The same is often true for the voices of teachers, a historically feminized profession whose members are often presumed to be unprofessional (Drudy, 2008).

Considering discourse allows for the possibility "to find more complex, less coherent and much less 'transparent' ways of registering the voices of teachers, students, and researchers to prevent their dismissal once again as 'merely' personal' (MacLure, 2003, p. 148). In this project, I positioned my participants as subjects who were immersed in a broad range of political, social, and ethical discourses, inhabiting complexities that, at times, seem impossible. Contextualizing teachers in this way, rather than as technicists (Taubman, 2009) or agents of curriculum implementation (Zeichner, 2010), has important implications for how teachers are viewed as professionals and how teachers' success is conceptualized. The participants in my study all identified as women. By inquiring into their language as indicative of their complex positioning and realities, rather than as spaces to critique their shortcomings, I work against misogynistic narratives that paint teachers as unprofessional or unintelligent. Instead, I highlight the ways these participants are responding to and navigating complex sociopolitical discourses.

Kumashiro: Bringing Poststructural Thinking to Teacher Education

MacLure's (2003) writing on discourse in educational research illustrated some of the possibilities for thinking about education through a poststructural lens, especially for researchers. Kumashiro's (2000; 2001; 2012; 2015) writings connected poststructural ways of thinking to pedagogical practice in order to illustrate the anti-oppressive possibilities of such an approach. Like MacLure (2003), he insisted that "students are never exactly who we think they are, they never come from exactly where we think they do, and they never respond exactly as expected" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 8) and thus conventional, developmentalist or meritocratic ways of viewing teachers and learners will always fail. Instead, he proposes a new type of anti-oppressive work in education that first makes use of poststructural thinking to address the "multiplicity and situatedness of oppression and the complexities of teaching and learning" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 25) and that also resists the idea of education as an "easy, rational, straightforward process" (2001, p. 8). In other words, Kumashiro insisted that in order to work toward justice, both educational researchers and teacher educators must let go of simple stories about how power and oppression operate *and* about how teaching and learning operate. By thinking with poststructural ideas around discourse, then, it is possible to pursue educational research that is anti-oppressive in that it refuses simple stories and insists on the embeddedness of teaching, learning, and research in a long history of language and power.

Kumashiro also discussed what a poststructural approach could mean for the pedagogy of teacher education. He wrote:

> 'Education' is not about repeating what we already know, or affirming what we already believe, or reinforcing what we had previously learned. That is merely repetition. Education, I believe, is about learning something new, something different; education is about change. Perhaps this is all common sense, but what is significant, here, is the recognition that repetition (such as the affirmation of who we are and what we believe) is often a comforting process (because it tells us that we are smart or good). In contrast, education (especially the process of learning something that tells us that *the very ways we think and do things* is not only wrong but also harmful) can be a very discomforting process. My point here is that by realizing that anti-oppressive education necessarily involves crisis and getting such, educators can change the problematic ways in which their approaches to teaching and learning privilege rationality. (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 7, emphasis original)

In other words, Kumashiro carried the idea of questioning commonsense assumptions into the space of teacher education. He insisted that anti-oppressive education must be filled with discomfort and crisis. In this project, I took up the assumption that learning to be a justice-oriented teacher is laden with crisis. By looking closely at the speech of my participants, I worked to unravel the crisis they experienced in the beginning of their process of becoming justice-oriented teachers.

Considering the Literature on Poststructural Theories and Justice-Oriented Teacher Education

Many educational researchers have taken up the poststructural project to think about issues related to justice. In this section, I consider the extent to which extant studies

engage in poststructural theories to open up spaces "of rupture – of interrogation and disruption – in the (uncertain) hope that this will generate possibilities for things to happen that are closed off by the epistemologies of certainty" (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 5). The goal of research engaged with poststructural theory is not to create simple stories about how issues of power, marginalization, or justice are at work in teacher education classrooms, but rather to complicate our thinking about those issues in classrooms, to see the ways in which teacher educators, preservice teachers, and classrooms are all in ongoing processes of navigating discourses which position them in particular ways. Here, I situate my project in the broader field of scholarship engaging poststructural thinking around issues of justice in education.

Tracing Identity Discourses

There is a strong tradition of thinking with poststructural theories, especially with the work of Foucault and Bakhtin, in educational research. To situate my work among this broader field, I will focus on giving an overview of some studies which cite ideas around discourse to do work related to justice in educational spaces.

Several researchers connected poststructural theories to social justice by considering the way that discourses related to race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality function in classrooms. For example, Engebretson (2016) analyzed the way that dominant discourses around femininity were associated with language of frustration in an assignment which asked preservice teachers to create a diagram of their own identity. Hossain, Mendick, and Adler (2013) considered how preservice teachers discussed their racial and gender identities as they related to a new mathematics curriculum. Llewellyn (2009) also looked at the ways that preservice teachers talked about masculine or

feminine identities in a math education course. Rubin (2018) followed one preservice teacher and identified moments where she intentionally drew upon her identity as a queer, White woman to push her students to trouble assumed binaries in the classroom. These studies open up conversations about identity in justice-oriented educational research, moving away from conceptions of identities as fixed categories with distinct characteristics and moving toward considering individuals as subjects who are formed by varied identity discourses. Further, these studies often illustrate how these identity discourses tend to function to create differentials in positioning and power.

Coding for Discourse

Some qualitative work also takes up the idea of discourse as a way to conceptualize and complicate thematic coding, serving to open up rather than essentialize the data. For instance, Charles (2016) investigated how colonial and post-colonial discourses emerged in the conversations of Australian preservice teachers who engaged in short-term teaching residencies in Aboriginal communities. She conducted interviews with students after they returned from the experience and then analyzed their transcripts for evidence of colonial or postcolonial thinking in their responses. Ultimately, she was able to draw conclusions regarding the non-linear and non-uniform ways the preservice teachers discussed this experience by ascribing the codes “colonial discourse” and “post-colonial discourse” to their language. Chao et al. (2019) engaged in similar coding practices with their data which collected interviews and assignments from preservice teachers engaging in a study abroad experience in China. In that study, the authors associated different phases of preservice teachers' identity development relating to their thinking about those different from them and their confidence as pedagogues as the

preservice teachers engaging with different discourses. While using discourses to code data could be thought of as positivistic, studies such as these illustrate the ways that applying thinking about discourse to traditional qualitative methods can open up the data. In both Charles and Chao et al.'s work, the researchers used the process of coding to highlight spaces where particular circulating discourses seemed to appear in order to make broader statements about the positioning of their participants among those discourses.

These studies demonstrate what thinking with discourse can offer educational research. While some strategies employed in these studies may seem lodged in other paradigmatic spaces, I echo Lather's (2006) argument that "paradigm proliferation"(p. 35) can be a good thing to think with, because it allows us to "say yes to the messiness" (p. 48) and make our way in a "disjunctive affirmation..[which is] neither reconciliation nor paradigm war, [but] is about thinking difference differently" (p. 52).

Historical Tracing

Discourse has also been taken up in studies that engage historical tracings of ideas that relate to justice-oriented education. By looking at how ideas are taken up and deployed over a particular historical period, researchers can make assertions about how powerful ideas come to occupy the positions they do. One example of this work is Schmeichel's (2012) genealogy of culturally relevant teaching. In this study, Schmeichel connected contemporary thinking about culturally relevant education to thinking from the 1960's, which insisted on the differentiation between White students and students of color. She then traced the way that culturally relevant practice shifted and changed to be considered an equity practice in schools. Finally, she critiqued the way the complex and

nuanced stance of being culturally relevant has been flattened into a set of practices to be implemented. For the purposes of method, studies like Schmeichel's represent meaningful engagements of discourse as ways to unravel why the world has come to be the way it is and to better understand complex positionings among powerful ideas that produce subjects in particular ways.

Research Design

Initially, I imagined this dissertation as an engagement with preservice teachers that would allow me to address my research questions in a more abstract way: I would present the participants with a series of elicitation vignettes during an interview, and I would draw on their responses to discuss the ways particular ideas about justice were/were not powerful to them and consider the types of language they used in justifying those positions. What developed instead involved a great deal more time, but I would also argue, allowed for a more complex and thus more helpful picture of how the idea of justice is functioning in the lives of early-career teachers.

The pivot to this more expansive project was a result of a conversation with a cohort of students with whom I worked as a teacher educator. In the summer of 2020, my co-instructor and I hosted a Zoom meeting with a cohort of students who had just graduated from their middle grades teacher education program in May 2020. We taught this cohort of students for each of their core education courses over a two-year span. The courses we taught had an explicit justice-orientation. Our purpose in hosting the call was to work through their thoughts and anxieties as they approached their first year of teaching in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and surrounded by visceral reminders of legacies of racism and oppression. When asked how they were thinking about issues of

justice in their communities and schools, tensions began surfacing. Several of the graduates described feeling obligated to engage their students in conversations about legacies of oppression and particularly about how those legacies were surfacing through the COVID-19 pandemic and the media coverage of systemic racism through the summer. However, they also described the forces and policies within their school that they saw as inhibiting their ability to have those conversations. This conversation made clear the ways that some of the discourses which are powerful in teacher education programs may differ from those that are powerful in K-12 educational settings. Thus, it felt relevant to consider what justice means in different spaces and how different ideas about justice are maintained and privileged through discursive practice. Further, these graduates expressed a desire for a space to work through their grapplings with one another.

As a result of this call, I reimagined the dissertation project. The elicitation devices and the interview were still vital components of the data collection. However, I added a monthly focus group component which served two purposes. First, it allowed me to trace the different discourses around issues of justice that were voiced at different moments during the year. Given that the 2020-2021 school year encompassed not only the COVID-19 pandemic but also a major national reckoning with racism, a highly fraught election, an insurrection, an impeachment, and a national rallying cry around eliminating discussions of race from schools (i.e., Critical Race Theory), listening to the participants' talk around justice over the full academic year was incredibly valuable. Second, the focus group structure allowed me to be responsive to the needs of this group of participants who wanted a space to think and talk through their experiences in the

classroom with colleagues they trusted and saw as like-minded. In this section, I walk through the data collection methods which I employed in order to respond to the research questions: *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of justice operating in schools? What discourses do they call upon in responding?*

Participants and Recruitment

I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) to recruit six individuals who completed their initial teacher education program in Spring 2020 and began their first-year teaching in Fall 2020. To identify participants, I sent an email to an entire cohort who graduated from a Middle Grades Teacher Education Program in Spring 2020 asking if they would be interested in participating in the study which would consist of individual interviews as well as monthly focus groups. I communicated that these focus groups were meant to be places where participants could discuss problems of practice, especially as they related to justice in schools. While many members of the cohort expressed interest in participating, they were wary of taking on an additional commitment during their first year of teaching, especially while many were concurrently pursuing their master's degree.

Upon receiving responses from the six participants, I set up brief, individual meetings with each of them to discuss the trajectory of our time together and to go over the consent form. Once I received the signed forms from each participant, I scheduled their individual interviews and the first monthly focus group discussion. I used Doodle polls to schedule each discussion and both the interviews and focus groups were held on Zoom. This allowed all the participants to stay safer during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed participants who were separated geographically to come together

for the discussions. Each Zoom meeting was recorded and transcribed in the summer following the 2020-2021 academic year.

Participants

At this point in writing this dissertation, I experienced a moment of tension. It seems consistent with dissertation traditions to offer a description of my participants, listing their ages, as well as their racial and gender identities. However, if I am aligning myself with Foucauldian ideas of the subject, I also want to resist essentializing these individuals, whose subjectivities are always in flux and always determined by the complex interweaving of discourses attaching to and acting on their bodies. I also want to resist psychologizing their responses and justifying their choices based on these categorizations. Further, thinking poststructurally asks us to interrogate the ways in which we as readers ascribe meaning to demographic markers. For this reason, I have chosen to not attribute the data throughout the dissertation to individual participants, referring to all of the participants only as "a participant." I made this choice because the task of this particular discussion of the research is not to trace the evolution or ideas of individuals, but to look to the speech of the participants as indicating particular ideas and discourses in which they were embedded. While I do not include names or pseudonyms for the participants, I do use gendered pronouns throughout the dissertation. Earlier in this chapter, I pointed to MacLure's (2003) arguments about the potential for discourse analysis to enrich feminist research. I want to draw attention to the voices of these participants as voices of individuals who identify as women in order to emphasize the complexity of women's speech and specifically of women teachers' speech.

Because a central tenet of discourse analysis is the primacy of context, I will offer some overview of the basic characteristics that the participants shared with me, recognizing the complicated nature of this information described above. Six individuals consented to participate in the study. In May 2020, four of the participants completed their B.S.Ed. and two completed their M.Ed. All six of the participants identified as female and White. I include their racial identification here because it is significant to consider their racial identification in the many instances where they discussed issues of race in their classrooms. The participants differed in how they described themselves politically, with one describing herself as conservative, one as libertarian, and the rest as degrees of liberal ranging from “extremely liberal” to “a bit left-leaning". The participants’ social classes also varied, with two describing their upbringing as working class, and the remaining four describing themselves as middle-class.

One participant taught 4th grade Social Studies and English Language Arts at an elementary school, and the others all taught in middle schools. Two taught eighth grade Physical Science, one taught sixth grade Math, one taught eighth grade Social Studies and one taught seventh grade Social Studies. The school districts they all worked in spanned across the state of Georgia in the southeast United States.

The Omnipresence of Race and Gender. While the central task of this dissertation is not an analysis of the participants’ race and gender, it is imperative that I make clear that their self-described status as White women figured prominently in the ways they talked about justice throughout all of our conversations. The ways that the participants spoke about social issues such as Black Lives Matter or the 2020 Presidential Election are deeply entwined with their position as White women teachers in the

southeastern United States. Throughout this dissertation, I will use gendered pronouns to refer to these participants as women, and each time I invoke those gendered pronouns it would certainly be relevant to note, again and again, the participants' racial subjectivities. Certainly, there is space for significant additional analysis of the participants' racial and gendered subjectivities as they are bound up in their speech throughout the transcripts. In this dissertation, which can only treat a limited number of arguments out of the data, I have chosen to structure my argument around the participants' positioning among powerful discourses emanating from school administrators and media about how justice-work can or should be taken up in schools. This choice to illustrate the ways that teachers are situated among political discourses does not mean that I do not see the participants' entanglement with and enactments of discourses of whiteness and femininity as insignificant. Taking up this analysis with an explicit focus on race and gender would make for an entirely different study, and while it is something I intend to pursue in future projects, it is not the center point of this dissertation.

The Sociopolitical Context of Georgia. Because of the importance of context in the work of discourse analysis, it is also imperative that I discuss the particular sociopolitical realities that existed for these participants in the state of Georgia in 2020. The participants' responses are situated within the particular context of education in the state of Georgia. Politically, Georgia was a reliably Republican state for several decades leading up to the 2020 Presidential Election. However, changing demographics in the state as well as incredible efforts to register and support voters by leaders like Stacy Abrams led to Democrat Joe Biden winning the 2020 Presidential election in Georgia by a narrow margin (Allen, 2021; Moore, 2020). At the same time, the politically

conservative State Legislature still held power over Georgia schools. In the summer following the 2020-2021 school year, the state education board voted 11-2 to pass a resolution aimed at silencing conversations around race and racism in Georgia schools (Jones, 2021). Since that summer, legislation such as House Bill 888, aimed at limiting conversations around race and identity in classrooms, and threatening to dock school district funding for violations garnered support from many in the state (Tagami, 2022). This complex political climate formed the backdrop for the participants' remarks throughout the interviews and focus groups and thus must be acknowledged here.

My Relationship with the Participants. Notably, when the scope and structure of this project changed, so did my relationship with the participants. Rather than engaging in detached interviews with people I had never met before, I instead spoke monthly with teachers who I had worked closely with over a two-year period: teaching their courses, reading their assignments, and in many cases, supervising them in the field. My reaction to this, at first, was anxiety. Would this make my data matter less? Would it somehow taint the findings? Once the conversations began, I saw the benefits that my relationship with the participants brought to the study.

First, the participants' experiences of me and of their time together may have resulted in more lengthy conversations and more thorough sharing. A central component of Bakhtin's (1981) work on language is the idea of answerability. He wrote that "the word in living conversations is directly, blatantly oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" (p. 280). In other words, when individuals speak, they are creating the conditions for someone to answer their speech. They are never speaking from a "pure" or uninhibited

space but are instead performing in particular ways based on context. In the case of my interviews and focus groups with the participants, this afforded some benefits. For one, the participants and I had shared understandings of some words, ideas, and experiences. They would often reference experiences they had in their teacher education program as well as specific assignments or ideas that resonated with their experiences in schools. Additionally, there were some interesting tensions that arose around what they presumed I would approve and disapprove of in their teaching. This will be elaborated further in Chapter Seven as I discuss my findings.

In sum, while I worried that having a pre-existing relationship with my participants might somehow make the data less *valid*, a consideration of this work as a poststructural project will remind the reader that there is no direct, unified subject whose essence I am trying to surmise through an impartial interview. Rather, I am situating these participants in a field of pressures and ideas. Ultimately, I argue that having some familiarity with me as a researcher allowed the participants to share more about their experiences of those pressures during their first year teaching.

Interviews

Each participant engaged in an individual interview which had two parts (Interview protocols are available in Appendices A & C). The first part asked them questions related to their experiences in education as well as the context of their current teaching job. This part of the interview was meant to collect the participant's talk about "how they have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world" (Patton, 2015, p. 526). All of these interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. The way the participants talked about their school settings, their goals as teachers,

and their experience of teacher education provided valuable insight into the types of discourses that were at work.

Some scholars have critiqued interviews in poststructural research because these structures are often assumed by researchers to engage in humanistic, essentializing, or psychologizing work that runs counter to poststructural thinking (e.g. Fadyl & Nicholls, 2012). However, I draw on scholars who have argued for the value of using these theories of discourse to consider interview data as a social text in which intricacies and inconsistencies in participant responses can point to larger circulating ideas and systems of thought (Talja, 1999; Tobin, 2000). For example, in his book *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats: Children's Talk about the Media*, Tobin (2000) described the power of conversations to illustrate the way discourses function in particular contexts. He highlighted the way that examining participants' talk allowed insight into how those individuals made sense of the world: which forces and ideas are powerful and which are not. Citing Bakhtinian thinkers, Tobin suggests that engaging in interviews and conversations facilitates an exploration "of the anxieties, concerns, and tensions of the larger society as verbalized by the utterances of individuals" (p. 14). Thus, the interviews from this study serve to illustrate the current landscape for teachers rather than illustrating the teachers themselves.

Elicitation Interviews

The second part of the interview was structured around several elicitation which are available in Appendix B. The purpose of these vignettes was to present the participants with multiple ways of conceptualizing justice in order to record their reactions to the varied conceptualizations. In this part of the interview, I shared a set of

Google Slides with the participant, and each slide contained a single vignette. The participant would read the vignette, then I prompted them to respond using a protocol included in Appendix C. This protocol asked the participants to first describe how they responded to the actions each teacher took in the vignette. Then, I instructed them to share what they thought was effective and what they thought was ineffective about the particular vignette as it related to justice in the classroom. After the participants talked about each vignette, I asked them to use the edit function in Google Slides to rearrange the vignettes in order of their preference. I asked them to narrate their decisions as they arranged the slides, and in this narration, there was important insight into how varying ideas about justice were/were not powerful for the participants. Below I will outline the ways that both elicitation devices and vignettes have been taken up in qualitative research. Then I will provide an overview of the vignettes I created for this project.

Elicitation Devices in Qualitative Research. While there is not a strong history of using vignettes in educational research, many researchers have employed other types of elicitation devices, such as photographs, objects, or videos (e.g. Harper, 2002; Sewall, 2007; Torre & Murphy, 2015; Willig & Rogers, 2017). Elicitation devices are helpful research tools because they "facilitate discussions, particularly by using concrete and familiar tasks to explore abstract concepts, by shifting attention onto external materials or scenarios, and by reducing power inequities" (Barton, 2015, p. 199). Because conceptualizations of justice are abstract topics, the vignettes served as tools to bring those abstract ideas into a form that is both more straightforward to discuss and more clearly linked to the work of a classroom teacher. Through these conversations, I was able to gain insight into how teachers respond to these differing conceptions of justice.

Further, during these discussions, participants seemed to call upon other discourses or ways of thinking that were significant in shaping their understandings of teaching, learning, and classrooms. Identifying these discourses could provide valuable insight into the complicated landscape of meaning and value into which social justice teacher educators enter.

Vignettes in Qualitative Research. Vignettes in qualitative research are short stories which are designed to elicit participant responses. Unlike case studies, which present long descriptions of situations in which participants are asked to solve a problem (Engle & Faux, 2006; Jeffries & Maeder, 2011), vignettes are shorter and less-complex (Finch, 1987, Jeffries & Maeder, 2011). Typically, participants are not asked to deliver a solution to the issues described in vignettes. Instead, participants are asked to respond to the vignettes in a more open-ended way (Hughes & Huby, 2002).

Importantly, vignettes used in qualitative research should be rooted in either real-world experiences or literature. This helps to ensure that vignettes seem relevant (Neff, 1979) and realistic (Finch, 1987). The vignettes I created for the purpose of this study are rooted in both justice-oriented education literature and recent media publications regarding responses to COVID-19 and racial violence. Each vignette is rooted in an approach to justice-oriented education and many also reference news media sources from the first half of 2020 which considered different ways teachers might respond to contemporary crises. Connecting these vignettes to problems educators were facing in that moment contributed to the relevance of the vignettes to preservice teachers. Further, rooting each vignette in a distinct strand of justice-oriented teaching allowed for insight

into how preservice teachers respond to different philosophies of justice in a way that simply asking “how do you define justice” would not allow.

The majority of vignette-based research occurs in fields such as medicine and social work, where vignettes are used to “highlight selected parts of the real world that can help unpackage individuals’ perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes to a wide range of social issues” (Hughes, 1998). In research, vignettes are not meant to provide exact analogues to what participants would do in a real-life situation. Instead, they are meant to explore the main factors which influence participants' responses (Hughes, 1998). Barnatt et. al (2007) took up these ideas in a study aimed at exploring teachers’ responses to situations related to justice in their classrooms. However, unlike the vignettes I have written, these vignettes were presented as scenarios in which the teacher had to devise a response to an action taken by a student, such as a White student yelling at his Latina classmates to “speak English!” While the structure of the vignettes is distinct, Barnatt et. al’s study, as well as the studies which exist in other fields, suggest that using vignette presents a fruitful method to consider the ways in which preservice teachers respond to different ways of pursuing justice in the classroom and also what discourses they call upon in those responses.

The Vignettes in This Project

Because it would have been impossible in the scope of the study to account for all possible conceptions of justice in education, I chose to create vignettes around six concepts which I will describe below. I selected these concepts because they represented ideas around justice rooted in distinct theoretical and ontological frameworks and they were represented in recent practitioner literature discussing responses to either COVID-

19 or Black Lives Matter. These criteria allowed me to engage concepts that were more likely to be circulating in the participants' contexts. Below, I will describe each of the concepts used in the vignettes, the full text of which can be found in Appendix B.

Multicultural Education

This vignette is not based on the full concept of multicultural education as described by Banks (1993) and Gay (2004). Instead, this vignette is informed by the limited ways in which multicultural education is often enacted (Dover, 2009), by incorporating a few individuals, stories, or ideas from historically marginalized groups into an otherwise unchanged curriculum. In this vignette, the teacher chose to incorporate more diverse books into the classroom library and to highlight diverse historical figures in weekly discussions. Throughout the vignettes, I intentionally incorporated some ideas which were meant to force the participants to respond to particular classroom practices. In this vignette, the teacher specifically chose not to share with their students that they had made these changes or why they had made these changes. Of all of the vignettes, this was the move that sparked the most discussion from the participants, allowing for significant insight into powerful ideas about what teachers should and should not be. This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Neoliberal, Meritocratic Education

This vignette is informed by the popular narrative of the need to close the "achievement gap" (Schwartz, 2001) which is thought to exist between students from privileged backgrounds and those from historically marginalized communities. Specifically, this vignette is modeled after articles that began being published in Spring

2020[24] which expressed deep fear over students falling behind during COVID schooling (e.g. Strauss, 2020). In this vignette, the school facilitated additional study sessions throughout the day to specifically benefit those students who were unable to access their online coursework in the Spring of 2020.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

This vignette does not represent the full concept of culturally responsive education as described by Villegas and Lucas (2002a,b), among others, as many of the tenets of culturally responsive education are dispositions rather than actions. However, this vignette describes one way in which some educators take up culturally responsive ideas (Hammond, 2014). Specifically, the teacher described in the vignette researches and adopts classroom practices that he's read are best for Black and Brown students such as call-and-response. I also included the teacher's choice to offer raps as an assessment, a practice which has been critiqued as a misfiring of culturally responsive intentions that ultimately perpetuates racist thinking (Love, 2019).

Anti-Oppressive Education

This vignette is based on some of the lesson plans described by Kumashiro (2000, 2015) in his work on anti-oppressive education which closely resemble some lessons which were encouraged for teachers to use following the murder of George Floyd. This work asks teachers to have conversations with their students around systemic oppressions and then to focus on places, especially within the school, where students have noticed oppressive systems. These conversations were meant to lead to moves to disrupt

[24] And continue to be published as of the writing of this chapter in Fall 2021

inequities in schools and give students the space to advocate for themselves and their peers.

Trauma-Informed Education

This vignette is rooted in Crosby et. al's (2018) notion of using trauma-informed practices in schools to work toward social justice. In the vignette, the teacher dedicates classroom time to having small group conversations with students about their feelings and experiences with regard to both the pandemic and the racial violence and protests of summer 2020. Additionally, I included a sentence stating that the teacher pushed back the class curriculum by a few days to facilitate these discussions. Many of the participants remarked on this choice which provided insight into the power of standards and curriculum acting on teachers in schools. The participants' comments about this choice are further elaborated in Chapter Nine.

Character Education

Many schools, particularly well-known charter networks like KIPP, subscribe to the idea that teaching children (specifically those from historically marginalized communities) character traits such as grit and resilience is and justice-oriented move as it prepares those students to succeed in dominant culture (Papano, 2013). This vignette described a team of teachers who planned to teach mini-lessons based on character traits and provide students with feedback on their progress in these particular areas.

The purpose of choosing these approaches to justice-oriented education is precisely because they are rooted in disparate ideas about what justice might mean in schools. Numerous critiques of each of these ideas exist, and I expressed to the participants throughout our discussion that I was not advocating for any one of these

approaches. However, many of the vignettes did seem to resonate with ideas around justice that the participants encountered either in their own schooling, in the media, or in their teaching. For this reason, I argue that using elicitation vignettes offered a powerful tool for identifying and tracing ideas around justice in the participants speech. In the section that follows, I will describe how I employed ongoing focus groups with the participants to trace the tensions and inconsistencies around justice that continued to emerge over the course of the year and in response to broader national conversations.

Focus Groups

From September-April,[25] the participants were invited to participate in monthly Zoom focus groups. I scheduled the meetings via Doodle at the beginning of each month, and while not every participant was able to attend every focus group, I typically had at least four participants in each session. Like interviews, it is possible to critique the use of focus groups in work informed by poststructural thinking because this work is also often taken up to essentialize subjects and experiences. However, there have been numerous scholars who effectively engage focus groups as ways to think about how discourses function (e.g. Tobin, 2000; Koch, 2013; Kamberelis et al., 2018).

Coule (2013) suggested that engaging in poststructural thinking around focus groups requires the researcher to allow conversations to be as unstructured and natural as possible. Thus, while I arranged and observed the focus group sessions, I intervened minimally in the participants' conversations. My protocol for the focus groups consisted

[25] Excluding the month of February because I had recently given birth

of three parts[26]. First, I facilitated ten to fifteen minutes of small talk and catching up with the participants. Next, I asked the participants "where are you seeing issues of justice in your schools and classrooms?" As the participants responded to this question and discussed the issues arising in their individual contexts, I asked follow-up questions such as, "how did you respond?" or "have you seen similar issues elsewhere?" Finally, I asked the participants if they had any questions for me or the rest of the group related to justice-work in their schools and classrooms. Like the interviews, these discussions did not seek to identify intention behind what the participants were saying or to essentialize participants based on their responses. Instead, the focus groups are seen as particular social enactments of discourses (Halkier, 2010) which make visible what is thinkable and sayable regarding justice in education as the participants move through various phases of 2020-2021 academic year.

The most notable feature of the focus groups was the way each one took on the character of the moment as the participants troubled through how various changes in the pandemic as well as national and political events impacted both their ideas of teaching and their lived experiences in the classroom. For this reason, the focus groups added important complication to the data gathered from the elicitation interviews. The ways that the participants' language about justice, about teaching, about children, and about themselves changed over the course of the year emphasized the idea that their subjectivities and ideas are never fixed, but always changing in response to numerous pressures and powerful discourses.

[26] The full protocol can be found in Appendix D

Ephemera

In addition to the scheduled interviews and focus groups, I shared additional communications with the participants over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year that I included in my data analysis. These ephemera included additional phone conversations around problems of practice and text messages exchanged in the evenings after major national events. For instance, some of the participants reached out to me for guidance about how to respond in their classrooms to events including the 2020 Presidential election, the January 6 insurrection at the capitol, or the trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer found guilty of killing George Floyd. Some participants reached out for advice on how to respond to communications they received from administrators, co-workers, and other community members. Still others shared assignments they created, which they saw as addressing issues of justice in schools. In June 2021, after the academic year was complete, some participants joined me for an additional call. At this time, several states were working to pass legislation banning the discussion of Critical Race Theory in schools. During the call the participants talked through their responses to this resolution and supported each other in thinking through what it might mean for their practice.

Rather quickly, the data for this project grew exponentially. However, this large quantity of data allowed for a more dynamic consideration of the research questions. Had I only considered the participants' initial elicitation interviews, it would have been possible to argue that they clearly aligned with particular ideas about justice and found fault with others. Instead, the tensions and contradictions the data illustrated between their interviews and their talk in the focus group provided a rich space to trace the

messiness of both being and becoming justice-oriented educators. In the following section, I will explain some of the tools that facilitated my analysis of the data.

Data Analysis

In describing how to use poststructural discourse theories for analysis, MacLure (2003) explains that:

> analysis of discourse needs to do two, virtually incompatible things. First, it needs to stick close to the details of particular texts ...worrying away at the word-y fabric out of which arguments are woven. But secondly, analysis is also a matter of moving away from the details of the specific text - of moving back and forwards through other texts, of other times, to try to glimpse the vastly bigger fabric of intertextual associations within which each particular text is suspended" (p. 23).

In other words, this strand of discourse analysis does not stick to strict methodological procedures. It stays close to the text and takes in what is also beyond the text. While there are not rigid, prescribed methods to this analysis, it must consider “tensions and contradictions” (Freeman, 2016), open up spaces of rupture (Stronach & MacLure, 1997), and “unravel taken-for-granted constructions” (Schmeichel, 2015, p. 4) in order to open up “creative source[s] for new understanding” (Davies, 2003, p. 165). This is, of course, a tall order. While I engaged in multiple rounds of reading and rereading, I called on two methods employed in studies of discourse to guide my process.

Text Mapping

Bakhtin (1981) described language as something that did not belong to the speaker, but rather was made up of bits and pieces of discourses that have been circulating around the speaker. Fitting this theory, Bakhtinian text mapping (Tobin, 2000) "trace[s] out citations, allusions, and intertextual associations in interview transcripts" (p. 143). In other words, in text mapping the researcher looks for places where the speaker references or makes allusions to ideas and bodies of thought that may come from media, institutions, friends, family, or myriad other spaces in the participant's life. This type of research is closely tied to MacLure's (2003) description of moving backwards and forwards through the minute and the big-picture, as the researcher must be thinking both about the specific ways that words and ideas are being deployed as well as the cultural spaces from which that language may have emanated.

This analysis required me to complete numerous close readings of the text while, at the same time, continuously reading and consuming other forms of media including social media, popular network and cable news outlets, YouTube videos and podcasts. By reading and rereading these texts alongside each other, I was able to see places where the participants' language echoed discourses that were circulating in other spaces. In some cases, these references were quite explicit. For example, when discussing issues of justice in schools, one participant continually brought up the fact that she felt oppressed in schools because she could not talk about her Christian beliefs with her students. The "war on faith" is an idea often invoked by right-leaning politicians and journalists that expresses outrage at the idea that teachers and administrators may not engage in Christian prayer at public schools in the United States. In his last year in office, President Trump

even went so far as to sign an executive order on religious liberty to protect prayer in schools (Associated Press, 2020). In this case, the possibility of a connection between the participant's comments and larger discourses relating to prayer in schools seems quite strong. However, in other situations, the allusions were less obvious, as it was not the words from other sources that echoed through the participants' talk, but rather the logics and value systems.

Tensional Analysis

MacLure (2013), Tobin (2000), and Hong et al (2017) all wrote about the need to look for aporia, contradictions, and places where the text comes apart in one way or another. MacLure described this as "slow[ing] down the facile machinery of interpretation so that it catches on the snags, the 'lucky finds', the marginalia, and the odd details" (p. 174). In those moments, then, it is possible to look for how multiple discourses might be acting on the participants and producing a moment where the internal logic of the text seems to fall apart. Hong et al. proposed a method of tensional analysis for doing this work. They called on scholars such as Talja (1999) who emphasized the importance of places where participants' statements contradict one another or seem inconsistent. In tensional analysis, the researcher looks at these inconsistencies and contradictions and considers the ways that they might be connected to larger, competing discourses circulating in society.

For example, when discussing recent report cards, one participant got caught up discussing grades. She said, "Grades. They don't matter. No. Don't let me say they don't matter. They matter. They don't, but they do." This moment in the data illustrated a surfacing tension. The participant was calling upon discourses that circulate in more

progressive educational circles that emphasize that the role of schooling is *not* defined by students' test scores and achievements, as well as more traditional ideas that stress the importance of student achievement above all else. Digging into tensions such as this one is an important exercise, especially when we consider the implications of this project for teacher educators.

Engaging tensional analysis required multiple re-readings of the data, combing through for moments that stood out as unusual. Hong et al. (2017) call on Sullivan (2012) in calling these key moments. A tensional analysis does not involve exhaustive coding of an entire transcript, but rather calls upon researchers to identify key moments and think specifically about the tensions at work in those moments.

Analysis Methods

In order to enact the processes of text mapping and tensional analysis, I first gathered all of the data I collected over the course of the year, including the interviews, focus groups, notes from phone conversations, text messages, and emails. I transcribed all of the focus groups and interviews, removing identifying information about the participants as I went. I chose not to use qualitative research software for the project because many software programs tend to work best when the researcher pre-loads the program with codes before analyzing the data. This process did not feel consistent with the type of analysis I was pursuing. Instead, I saved the transcripts as Microsoft Word files. Next, I installed a macro program that allowed me to label particular sections of the data using the comment feature and export the text excerpts and comments into a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel. Using this program, I read (and re-read and re-read) the

transcripts, marking places in the text where I either 1) noticed an allusion, reference, or trace of a broader discourse or 2) noted an aporia or moment of tension/contradiction.

This method may seem more rigid and structured than my description of poststructural engagements of discourse so far might suggest. However, Freeman (2016) noted that there are no set methods for discourse analysis. Further, Threadgold (2000) asserted that often poststructural scholars must make use of more structuralist research structures, but by approaching those structures with an attention to disruption, unraveling, citationality, and discourse, a poststructural project can still be achieved.

Once I had the data excerpts and comments pulled into the spreadsheet, I identified key moments (Sullivan 2012) that were ripe for tensional analysis. Additionally, I looked across the types of allusions/references/traces of discourses that appeared throughout the data in order to articulate some possible findings about both the ways the participants were responding to multiple ideas of justice and some possible discourses that may have been shaping their responses. I encountered many more circulating ideas and discourses in the participants' speech than I was able to include in this dissertation. I selected the particular sets of data I used to inform the findings chapters because they were indicative of the language and ideas that were circulating most commonly in the participants' talk. The precise focus of the findings chapters vary. Thus, as I moved through the findings in this dissertation, I will refer back to the specific types of comments and the specific methods that informed each chapter.

Methodological Limits

There are, of course, limits to what an exploration of discourse can provide. This dissertation is importantly not investigating the interiority of the participants. I was not

looking to understand what their responses meant, how they felt, or why they might have said certain things. Additionally, I am not seeking to judge whether or not they are articulating the *right* kind of ideas about justice[27]. While it would be possible to do this analysis from the data, it is not the goal of this project. Additionally, as described previously, my relationship with the participants might be described by some more traditional qualitative researchers as a factor that upsets the validity of the study. To this, I argue that there are no purely neutral researchers, and further that all participants in research are engaging in a type of performance. Thus, the belief that an 'impartial' interviewer might be able to get at more 'pure' responses is inaccurate. Finally, central to the concept of discourse is the specific context of the utterance. Thus, while some of the findings from this project articulate tensions and pressures that might be occurring on the national level, this dissertation is very specifically situated in a historical moment and geographic context.

From Feathers to Findings

In planning, conducting, and writing this dissertation, it was important to me that I was not trying to force a large grey feather into a small plastic pocket. That is, I wanted to engage in research in a way that insists upon the messiness, the un-catalogability, and the non-finality of the world. Working with discourse, which considers the way that "thousands of living dialogic threads brush up against each other" (Bakhtin, 1981), I

[27] This was especially difficult for me, as both a justice-oriented teacher educator and as the participants' former instructor. However, what mattered in this project was considering *what* the participants said and what those utterances might indicate about the discourses circulating in the particular space and moment. There are certainly statements the participants made that contradict what they learned from me and even some that may seem problematic. However, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to point out, judge, or interrogate those moments.

wanted to tend to the ways that teachers' (and anyone's) language is laden with tensions and contradictions that make simplifying their thinking, providing a summary or an overview, an impossible task. And so perhaps that will make this dissertation unsatisfying to those who prefer that everything fit neatly in its place. For me, it is much more satisfying to record what is chaotic and messy, in the hopes that we will cease trying to fit large gray feathers into excel spreadsheets and tiny plastic pockets.

In the following chapters, I present the findings from my analysis. This presentation is certainly not the only way that the data collected for the dissertation could have been analyzed. MacLure (2013) asserted that data analysis is, after all, "an experiment with order and disorder …not as a static representation or translation of a world laid before us on the operating table of analysis, but as an open-ended and ongoing practice of *making* sense" (p. 181, emphasis original). In other words, analytical strategies like the ones I employed in this project, offer only one way to begin making sense of the data at hand, and continued engagement with the data through differing analytical frames will make new thoughts and new insights possible. What the method of data analysis I employed in this dissertation stands to offer is insight into the extreme complexity of being a teacher in 2021. Acknowledging this complexity allows us to take more seriously the perspectives and concerns of teachers as they navigate powerful and contradictory discourses. It also stands to facilitate a more nuanced and robust form of teacher education toward justice that acknowledges and engages this complexity.

CHAPTER FIVE

JUSTICE AS CONTROVERSY, RACE, AND ELECTION

I remember feeling such confusion as a justice-oriented middle grades teacher. I graduated from my undergraduate institution ready to make the world a better, more just place. Over the following years I worked at three different schools, each arguing that they were doing work to make the world a better, more just place, and yet their approaches were entirely different and sometimes contradictory. For instance, in the city I worked in during my early years of teaching, there was a remarkable push to incorporate ethnic studies into the curriculum and to allow students to use the schooling space to explore their own cultures, histories, and traditions. Next, I moved on to a school where students read extensively about Civil Rights and systemic oppressions, engaging in collective dreaming about what an anti-oppressive society might look like. Finally, I relocated to a school where the curriculum was based entirely on classical principles, under the belief that students needed access to the language and content of "classical" texts written by predominantly White authors in order to be able to navigate higher education in the United States. As a budding justice-oriented teacher, I felt uncertain how to position myself and my commitment to doing justice-oriented work among these conflicting discourses and practices. Justice was about culture. It was about power. It was about achievement. So, I decided to get a Ph.D.[28] to try and make sense of it all.

[28] Obviously this decision was not quite this simple but that is not the point of this dissertation.

Of course, what I found was that there were even more concepts of justice, both in the literature and circulating in justice-oriented teacher education discourse, than I had encountered in those different teaching experiences. As I illustrated in Chapters Two and Three, the concept of justice seems to function in varying ways in the empirical and theoretical literature. In many empirical studies, justice is situated as a fixed thing, a goal for teachers to strive toward. By contrast, in the theoretical literature, justice is often acknowledged as a fluid and hard-to-pin-down abstraction. In this study, rather than looking for causality around *why* teachers did or did not enact a particular vision of justice-oriented teaching, I investigated the different ways participants talked about justice. Here and in the chapters that follow, my aim is not to provide clear cut assertions about the experiences of first-year justice-oriented teachers, but instead to engage with the messiness.

Analysis Methods

To begin chipping away at the question, *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of justice,* I will present some of the multiple ways in which participants talked about justice throughout the study. Often, when I asked a question using the word *justice*, such as, "*where do you see issues of justice in your school?"* the participants responded by discussing a particular topic or idea but did not actually use the word justice in their answer. Given the complex and unstable meanings of the term justice that have already been illustrated in this dissertation, this is not surprising.

Within a poststructuralist project, "discourse illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain

statements to be made and not others" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). In other words, the words that participants used to talk about justice were not random or coincidental, they were the product of particular ways of thinking and acting that had been made available within their contexts. Even more, the fact that multiple participants called upon the same language only reinforces the assertion that these particular ways of conceptualizing justice may have resulted from the specific context these participants occupied.

In order to analyze how the participants talked about justice, I went into the transcripts and pulled out each question in which I used the word justice[29]. This resulted in a total of 93 utterances. I then read the participants' answers to those questions and recorded which words they used in response to see if particular words came to be more associated with justice than others. Specifically, I noted the words that the participants used as the central focus of their response. For example, in one instance I asked a participant *"Where do you see issues of justice in your school?"* to which she replied, *"Well, I don't really see politics coming up much from the kids."* In this response, the word I noted as the focus of the response was *politics* because it was being used as an object in the sentence in the same way *justice* was being used as an object in the question. While the participant's response also used the word *I* and *the kids*, those words were not functioning in the same way *justice* did in the question. This process was somewhat messy, especially because I was analyzing transcripts of live speech. Thus, sometimes the participants' did not respond in clear, grammatically constructed sentences that were easy

[29] Some of these questions are repetitive. There were certain questions, such as "have any issues of justice come up in your school/classroom" that I asked during every conversation with each participant. Interview and Focus Group protocols can be found in the Appendices. I chose to include the question to which the participants were responding with the data in this chapter to illustrate the ways that the terms that I focus on were connected to the word justice.

to break down. For instance, in response to the same question, *"Where do you see issues of justice in your school,"* another participant responded, *"Um, I, well I haven't really been focused on it since I've just been trying to get settled and class is still online."* In this sentence, the pronoun *it* refers back to the word *justice* invoked in the question. However, the word *it* does not seem to indicate any particular ways that the participant was characterizing the word justice or any connections she was making with the word justice in the same way the previous participant seemed to be associating the word *politics* with justice.

As illustrated, this analysis (like all analysis) was subject to my judgement around which words participants were attaching to the idea of justice. By relying on the ways they structured their responses, I sought to achieve a level of consistency across my investigation of the participants' utterances. Additional meaningful analysis could stem from employing tools such as systemic functional linguistics (Martin & Rose, 2007) to analyze the ways that *all* of the language in each response is interacting to point to particular ideas or relations of power. However, the purpose of my work was to see how the participants' were characterizing justice in their talk about their experiences at school. Thus, focusing explicitly on the words standing in for justice in their responses proved fruitful.

Many words were used in the participants' responses to questions containing the word *justice.* In some cases, they did respond with the word *justice.* Further, other frequently used words included *equity* (used 11 times) and politics (used 9 times). The three most frequent words used in response to my invocation of justice were *controversy/controversial, the election,* and *race.* Over the course of all of the interviews

and focus groups, in response to questions using the word *justice*, the word *controversy* was used 24 times, *race* 13 times, and *election* 19 times. Below, I explore how the participants made use of each of these terms.

Justice-as-Controversy

The broadest term the participants used when they responded to questions about justice was "controversial/controversy." Across all transcripts, I found numerous instances where participants used the word *controversial*, or *controversy*, in response to questions I asked about justice. Most typically, participants used the word controversy when they were responding to my questions about justice and then followed with various descriptions of how those conversations were kept out of their classrooms.

Restricting Controversy

In many cases when the participants used the word *controversy* or *controversial* in response to questions about justice, they either articulated some understood directive from school administration that controversy should be kept out of the classroom, or they provided examples of how they pivoted the conversation altogether. For instance, when I asked if any issues of justice had come up in one participant's classroom, she responded by saying:

> *My school tells us to avoid all controversy. We have to stay neutral. So I can't really bring it up.*

In this excerpt, the participant responded immediately to the idea of justice being brought up in the classroom by saying that she had to avoid controversy, indicating an acknowledgement of justice-as-controversy. She articulated that her school insisted that

teachers *"stay neutral",* positioning staying neutral as an alternative to controversy. Later in the dissertation[30], I will explore the concept of neutrality as it relates to conceptualizations of justice-oriented teaching. However, here, it is important to note that the preferred stance of the leaders at this participant's school was to pursue neutrality over justice-as-controversy. As a result, in response to my question about if any issues of justice have come up in her classroom, the participant answers *"I can't really bring it up."*

Another participant characterized justice as controversial when responding to the question "*have any issues of justice come up in your classroom?"* She said:

> *I don't think I've ever had anything that was too controversial. I've had some kids like basically say that they hated Trump, but I handled that by just saying like, 'Hey, you remember other people have other opinions, so we don't say things like that,' but there's never been anything where I felt like we couldn't discuss anything or talk about what we thought.*

When we were having this conversation, it was late October 2020, less than a month prior to the Presidential election. At that time, Trump was the sitting President and media outlets were filled with political campaigning, with candidates hurling criticism at one another. The participant notes that the criticism of Trump was controversial, but not so controversial that she was unable to handle it.

It is interesting to see the contradiction play out in this excerpt. Notably, the participant indicated that she handled the moment by reminding the student that other

[30] This exploration can be found in Chapter Eight

people have opinions so "*we don't say things like that.*" She then directly followed that example by acknowledging that there had never been anything she felt like they could not talk about as a class or "*talk about what we thought*" --when she had just told the student who said they hated Trump that they, in fact, could not talk about that. She reasoned that it was important for the student not to make remarks that might run counter to the opinions of others in the classroom. Although this participant's comments did not directly invoke the word *neutral*, her assertion that students should not say things that may contradict others' opinions seems to echo the idea of neutrality articulated by the first participant. While the first participant indicated that teachers in her school were expected to *remain neutral* by avoiding controversial issues altogether, this participant's comment seems to instead illustrate her role as the teacher is to *neutralize* these conversations by diffusing and discouraging student comments.

When asked, "*have any issues of justice come up in your classroom?",* a third participant also described keeping controversy out of the classroom. She said:

> *No. They [students] don't really say much, you know? They don't have opinions. I don't think they quite know what is going on in the world right now. They don't have the skills to relate to what's going on in the world right now. And right now, with everything going on, it's all so controversial, and in my personal opinion, I don't think it's my job as their fourth grade teacher to bring that up. They can talk about it with their parents. Maybe if I was a college professor or high school teacher. I don't know.*

In this excerpt, the teacher explained that she did not have conversations about justice issues in her elementary school classroom because her students did not begin those

conversations. She elaborated that she did not perceive her young students as "*having opinions*" or "*knowing what is going on in the world.*" Because she described what is going on in the world as controversial, she also stated that it was not her role as teacher to introduce it to her students. Instead, she hypothesized that this may be the work of the students' parents or a teacher of older students. Thus, she too indicated that justice-as-controversy does not have a place in her classroom.

Other Forces Constraining Justice-as-Controversy

In varying ways, all three of the teachers described above noted that the controversy they saw as part-and-parcel with justice was neutralized or kept out of their classrooms because of school administrators, students, or themselves as the teacher. However, other respondents indicated additional reasons for why justice-as-controversy was not present in their classrooms. For instance, when I asked *"have any issues of justice come up in your classroom?"* one participant answered that discussions of "*controversial stuff"* were constrained by curriculum and scheduling:

> *I feel like we haven't had a ton of controversial stuff. I mean the kids have chances to ask questions at the end of class and stuff, but like I said, some of them I only see for 20 minutes a day, you know? So, it just isn't a ton of time.*

Like the others quoted in this chapter, this participant immediately responded to questions about justice by speaking about controversy. However, she explained that those conversations were not absent from her class because the administrators, teachers, or students were keeping them out. Instead, she is constrained by time and the virtual-schooling schedule that was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the brief time allotted, she did not have the space to talk about "*controversial stuff*". Thus, rather

than discussing constraints that emerged from other people, this participant points to constraints that are situational and prevent conversations about justice.

Still another participant described a very different reason why justice-as-controversy was kept out of her classroom. When I asked her, "*have you had any conversations about justice in your classroom?"* She responded:

> *I learned my lesson when the parents came after me. So, I I mean, I try to stay away from it, generally speaking. I mean I want my students to feel like there is a safe place where they can talk about things. But I still try to get the message across without the controversy. I feel like that's a way that I can do that in the space that I'm in right now if that makes sense.*

In the beginning of her response, the participant refers to a situation which she had discussed with me in a previous phone conversation[31]. Earlier in the semester, to prepare for the upcoming Presidential election, she asked her students to take the *Isidewith* online quiz in her Social Studies class. The quiz presented a variety of policy issues and asked quiz takers to indicate how they responded to those issues. Then, the website calculated the quiz taker's score to indicate which political candidate most aligned with their views. After she gave the quiz in class, parents of her students posted complaints about her class on Facebook and reported her to school administrators. Thus, when asked if issues of justice have come up in her classroom recently, the participant described that she "*learned her lesson*" after that incident and thus avoids *"the controversy"*. Unlike the other participants, who described that justice-as-controversy is not in their classrooms

[31] This phone conversation was unscheduled. The participant called me to ask for guidance about how to navigate the situation. Because of this, I do not have a transcript of this conversation and can only provide this summary.

because they, their administrators, their students, or their scheduling preclude its inclusion, this participant stated that she would have liked to engage in justice-oriented teaching but she was constrained by the threat of parent backlash[32].

Keeping the Controversy Away

The term *controversy* has the broadest scope of the ideas that the participants associated with justice. It is relatively unspecific and could ostensibly refer to a wide range of topics or issues. However, while the exact scope of what *controversy* encompassed for these participants was not articulated, there was a commonality among how justice-as-controversy functioned in the classroom. Most typically, participants who responded to questions about justice by discussing controversy tended to talk about the ways that direct conversations about topics and issues related to justice were kept out of their classroom. The teachers described various forces as keeping the controversy out of their classrooms: administrators, the teachers themselves, students, and parents.

Defining justice-as-controversy is significant in that it positions enacting justice-oriented teaching as something that could lead to disputes or arguments: something dangerous, taboo, or problematic. In this way, the idea of justice is not a sort of shared goal toward which to strive, but rather something divisive, something that, if engaged by a teacher, could result in backlash or discipline. The fact that *controversy/controversial* was the most-used word in response to questions about justice seems to suggest that this idea, that justice work is inherently divisive, could be widespread.

[32] The discourse of community backlash is explored further in chapter 8. However, I have included this example in this chapter because it illustrates another facet of participants using the word *controversy* to talk about justice.

Justice-as-Race

Another term the participants frequently called up when asked about issues of justice was *race*. The concept of race is certainly more specific than *controversy*, as it points to a particular construct with historical and current-day manifestations. Movements for racial justice have a strong legacy in justice-oriented work, however, conceptualizing *justice-as-race* refers to only specific types of justice, excluding justice-work rooted in other identity categories, such as gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, or social class, and also excluding justice work rooted in intersectional identities or situated identities. In what follows, I offer some examples of how the participants discussed *justice-as-race* over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year.

"I Heard at Other Schools…"

In several cases, when the participants described justice-as-race, they contextualized their response in stories they had heard about other schools where teachers were unable to discuss issues of race. Typically, the participants contrasted their own settings to those schools in various ways. For instance, when asked *"would you feel comfortable bringing up issues of justice in your classroom?"* one participant explained:

> *This isn't at my school, but I know, just from hearing from just people I know that teach at other schools how, like they weren't allowed to talk about the stuff that was going on with like the, um, like the race riots and stuff over the summer. And a lot of those that are the more predominantly White schools where, you know, those are the students that probably need to hear it more so there's that. But then at my school, I'm allowed to talk about that as much as I would want to, but those*

> *aren't the students that need to hear it. The, um, the minorities, aren't the ones that need to hear. They are living it since they don't have the privilege.*

Here, the participant contrasted her school with other schools she has heard of in several ways. At other schools, teachers were not allowed to talk about the "race riots" that took place over the summer (referring to the Black Lives Matter protests that took place following the murder of George Floyd). The other schools were also predominantly White and thus, the teacher explained, the students there needed to have conversations about race. By contrast, the participant taught in a school that was not mostly White and she was welcome to talk about race, however she did not see her students as needing to have those conversations because "*they are living it since they don't have the privilege."* In this excerpt, the participant described conversations around justice as educative, to illuminate the realities of oppression to students who are privileged, rather than as conversations worth having with minoritized students who may have experienced the impacts of oppressions or injustices due to race.

Another participant also contrasted her school with other schools that negate the existence of racism. When I asked, "*Do you feel comfortable discussing justice and injustice in your classroom?"* she responded:

> *Well at my school. I mean, one good thing is I know they wouldn't get upset over me doing that kind of stuff. They actually, I mean, they're not some of those people that can get really defensive and like, say like, oh, like racism is not real. They're not, they're not like that at all. So, I think they would definitely, they would back that up. Um, my school, not worried about backlash, about that kind of stuff.*

> *Cause I know at some schools you have to worry about that more, but I don't see that being an issue at my school.*

This participant responded to a question about her comfort level discussing issues of justice by contrasting her school with schools that "*get defensive*" and say, "*racism isn't real*." Like the second participant, this one seemed to be setting up a contrast between schools that neglect to talk about racism and those that encourage conversations about racism, schools where there is a worry about *"backlash"* and schools where that worry is not present. Thus, like the previous participant, she saw her school as more open to conversations about race than other schools she has heard about.

Finally, when asked *"have you noticed any issues of justice in your school community?"* a third participant also described her school by differentiating it from other places. She explained:

> *Yeah, I know there are certain schools that are super already talking about all the different issues with race and justice. And there are a lot of schools that aren't, and those Principals are much more like 'Don't talk about it.' My school hasn't really said much one way or the other.*

This participant responded to a question about issues of justice in her school community by describing how different schools address "*race and justice,*" adding the term race to the language originally used in the question. Like the participants described throughout this section, she created a contrast between schools that are vocal about issues of race with those where principals silenced conversations around race. She characterized her school as falling somewhere in the middle because she has not received clear guidance one way or another. Interestingly, the teacher responded to a question about where she

has seen issues of justice in her school by drawing attention to the school's culture around discussing issues of justice (like race) rather than by explaining issues that might be circulating in the school.

All three of these participants connected their responses to questions about justice in their own classroom or community by referring to other settings that they have heard of where teachers are unable to confront topics like race. In this way, the idea of race might be functioning as a sort of indicator of the overall justice-orientation of a school with those that permit or encourage conversations about race being positioned as justice-oriented and those that suppress or discourage conversations about race as not justice-oriented.

Not Race, but Sexual Orientation

In some cases, the participants responded to questions about justice by listing multiple issues they categorized as justice issues. When this happened, the participants consistently discussed race before other topics they saw as connected to justice. For example, in response to, *"Have you noticed any issues of justice in your school community?"* one participant said:

> *I don't really see any issues like race or anything. I do have one issue with a student who is trans, though and is having conflicts with his grandma.*

When asked about issues of justice in her school community, this participant first responded by noting that she does not see issues of race in her school. While race might have been the first topic that the participant associated with justice, it was not the only one, as she continued to describe a concern she had regarding a transgender student and

his relationship with his family. Unlike the participants described in the previous section, who answered questions about justice by comparing their schools to others on the basis of whether or not race could be discussed, this participant seemed to point to race as only one category that might come to mind when thinking about justice. It is listed first, but it is not the only type of justice mentioned[33].

Another participant's response followed a similar pattern when asked "*have you noticed any issues of justice in your school community?"* she explained:

> *Honestly, I don't see very many issues in regards to race, which brings me a lot of joy. It makes me very happy. But that probably doesn't mean its not a thing. But I don't see it in my classroom. I do see some issues with students teasing other students for their sexual orientation. And like, they'll like, say like, 'Oh, like that's gay,' things like that. So, I have to call them out on those kinds of things.*

This participant's response differed slightly from the first respondent. While the first respondent noted that her school seemed to have no issues of race, this participant notes that even though she did not see issues of race "*that doesn't mean its not a thing*" and still impacting students in ways she may not have been aware of. However, like the first participant, she also pivoted from race to discuss the way she saw issues relating to sexual orientation in her classroom. It seems noteworthy that in these participants' speech, when asked about justice, they first focus on issues of race, then issues of sexuality, and do not elaborate beyond those. Further, they noted that in their school

[33] Further exploration of race and gender as oft-mentioned types of justice in participants' responses can be found in Chapter 6

spaces, issues surrounding sexuality seemed to be more out-in-the-open than issues surrounding race.

Race as Synonymous with Justice

In some ways, the participants' connection of justice to race was less surprising than some of the other associations they made. Movements for racial justice in schools have a long and tumultuous history that continues into the present day. While there are innumerable explanations for why race may have been associated with justice in the participants' responses, it is noteworthy that in these responses, being able to discuss race in the classroom seemed to be synonymous with being able to discuss issues of justice in the classroom. In this way, over 65 years after the desegregation of schools, the topic of race is still regarded as something perhaps unsafe to bring up in a school setting.

Justice-as-Election

The final term that came up frequently when I asked participants about justice was the 2020 United States Presidential election, which took place in November, 2020. The election, between Republican incumbent Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden was, like any Presidential election, a major event for the nation. Thus, it was not surprising that the election was something that was part of the participants' experience of teaching in the 2020-2021 school year. However, what was somewhat unexpected was that the participants associated the election with justice. Of course, the impacts of elections, from presidential, to gubernatorial, to school board, have significant effects on societies and those effects could be connected to issues that individuals might see as concerned with justice. Yet to consider the election itself as inextricable from issues of justice was noteworthy. In this section, I will highlight some of the many instances where

the participants in the study associated the term justice with the election before offering some possible insights into why this association may have been reasonable.

Talking about Justice, Talking about the Election

On several occasions, the teachers participating in the study responded to my questions which used the word justice by talking about how the election was or was not influencing their school and classroom. For instance, the following excerpts come from different participants in response to my question "*Have you seen any issues of justice coming up in your school or classroom?":*

> *Nothing really comes to mind right now. I think things are pretty neutral over the election, but I have a feeling as things unfold come January when things become official and settled, I have a feeling, some opinions are gonna come out. I could see some equity issues pop up that way with discussions or I guess a better word would be conversations between my students. But as of right now, everything has been kind of relaxed, nothing really pops into my head.*

Here, the participant immediately responded to a question about issues of justice by saying that "*things are pretty neutral over the election*," illustrating that the election seemed to be a justice issue. She continued by saying that as the election process went on, she worried that "*equity issues*" will come up as students' "*opinions come out,*" suggesting that perhaps opinions and the conflict that could arise from sharing opinions are connected with equity in the classroom.

Another participant responded to the same question in the following way:

> *Not really. Nothing compared to what others go through. I mean, my school, we haven't really been talking about the election. I haven't seen any issues with*

> *injustice. And they've been just really good about that. And I mean, the election hasn't really been brought up. I mean, I don't think most of their parents can even vote those as most of them are, um, immigrants. So it just, it just doesn't really get brought up at my school. So it just kind of a non-issue I mean, it's obviously the election is going to be an issue for them, but they don't really have a say, so it just doesn't really get, get talked about. I just don't have much to say. It isn't an issue in my school.*

Like the first participant, this one also immediately responded to a question about justice by discussing the way the election was not an issue that had been talked about much at her school. However, unlike the other participants, she described the reason that the election had not been discussed was that her students were immigrants and thus their families could not vote, making it *"a non-issue"*. Of course, none of the other students in the participants' classrooms (who all taught in middle and elementary school classrooms) would have been able to vote either. However, this participant seemed to be suggesting that the fact that the families of many students could not vote removed the students' engagement to talk about the election which existed in other schools.

Discomfort Discussing the Election

The first set of responses I highlighted focus on participants who associated the election with the term justice and, for the most part, did not see the election as coming up or causing problems in their school setting. A second type of response about the election also came up, participants who seemed to express concern about addressing the election in their school contexts. When I asked, "*Have any issues of justice come up at your school?"* one participant responded as follows:

> *I would say the day after that first debate there were some tensions. I always ask them like, how is everybody doing? And then this one kid, he was like, 'did everybody watch the election last? Or the debate last night?' And of course, they all were like, 'Ahhh,' and I was like, 'Yeah, that was quite a debate.' And then I just kind of like moved along. I don't know, I of course want to teach them about the election and stuff. But I don't really know how everybody's going to react, especially about when talking about the debate. I was like, yes, they had a debate last night, like kind of moving along. Of course, I don't want to say anything that could possibly be controversial. And I feel like this election is just the most controversial thing ever. So, I'm sure we'll talk about like what, what an election is and like, um, how voting works to some extent. Probably on Monday I would say, but I don't, I don't think we'll talk about either president, even if it's in like a non-biased way.*

This participant explained that when conversations about a Presidential debate came up in the classroom, she would respond with a factual statement, saying that there was a debate, but that she did not want to engage students in further conversation about it. She stated that "*of course, I don't want to say anything that could possibly be controversial*," possibly suggesting that she wanted to keep controversy out of her classroom, and that *"this election is just the most controversial thing ever*." Similar to the participants described in the first section of this chapter, this teacher seemed to be stating that controversy has no place in the classroom, and because the election is controversial it too needs to be kept out of the classroom.

Another participant echoed the idea that the election was both an issue of justice and controversial, and thus it was preferable to only discuss the basic facts of the election. When asked, "*Have any conversations about justice been coming up in your classroom?"* she answered:

> *I mean, we talked a lot about like we're voting on November 2nd, because they're learning democracy right now. Um, and some of them are still struggling like between democracy and autocracy. So just like using the election year right now to help them figure out that the United States gets to vote so we're a democracy. From there, I didn't push it a lot. I didn't necessarily like myself get into the differences in like Trump and Biden's views by myself. Just with how much backlash there is.*

This participant grounded her discussion of the election in teaching about the structure and functions of elections in general. She described that talking about the differences between the candidates' platforms is not something she approaches because of "*backlash*.[34]"

Finally, another participant expressed that she felt uncomfortable discussing the election as a justice issue because of her own conflicted reactions to it. When I asked, *"how are you feeling about having conversations about justice in your classroom?"* she explained:

> *I don't know how I will even face the election because I don't know where I stand on it necessarily. If it was a strict situation of what is right and what is wrong,*

[34] A discourse further described in Chapter Eight

> *there would be no election. So, I don't have a strong enough opinion and I don't feel educated enough politically to have one. I don't know, elections are an interesting situation that I don't fully understand as an American, especially today. People that I am close to are so very passionate about one side or the other. I consider myself more of libertarian. I'm a gray area person. I agree with parts on both sides. And I don't think that there's any one person in this election who is right for the job. So, I wouldn't know what to do. And I mean, I could facilitate a situation where students have the ability to talk. So giving them the playground to have the conversation, but I wouldn't know where to, I feel like that'd be one of those things where I'd need to be able to, to know a hundred percent everything that's going on to shut something down. Because I feel like there's some things that you need to be fact-checked on if you're going to say it. Yeah. I'm not going to say, let's talk about the election.*

Like the other participants described in this section, this teacher responded to a question about justice in her classroom by talking about the election. Specifically, she explained that she *"is not educated enough politically"* and that to talk about the election she felt that "*that'd be one of those things where I'd need to be able to, to know a hundred percent everything that's going on to shut something down."* Unlike other participants who seemed to be stating that they did not feel comfortable discussing the election in their classroom because of the possible controversy that could result, this teacher appeared to suggest that her discomfort stemmed from her own perceived lack of knowledge. Interestingly, she also pointed to her own uncertainty about the candidates, explaining that she "*doesn't have a strong opinion*" or "*think that there's any one person*

in this election who is right for the job." Her response is worthy of remark because it illustrates the ways that educators, too, are working to make sense of the complex sociopolitical landscape and that at times, it is the struggle to do so, rather than anxiety or fear, that limits what is brought up in their classrooms.

The Election is Everywhere

The 2020 US Presidential election dominated American news cycles for much of Fall 2020 and well into 2021. There was the inflammatory and unconventional first debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, in which Trump continually spoke over the moderator and Biden and called on the White supremacist Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by," eventually frustrating Biden to the point that he said "will you shut up, man?" (Montanaro, 2020). Then, as the election got underway, Republican officials began to question the integrity of voting practices and contest election results in multiple swing states, eventually evolving into a loud, powerful argument that the results of the election were invalid and the presidency had been "stolen" by Biden. The violent climax of these events occurred on January 6, 2021 when violent, armed insurrectionists stormed the Capitol during the certification of the election results armed with weapons, ready to attack members of Congress they encountered. The entire process was noteworthy and laden with controversy. Thus, it is reasonable that thinking and talking about the election were front-of-mind for teachers like those involved in this study. A possible reading of the participants' inclusion of the election as an issue of justice is as an extension of their talk about justice as something *controversial,* as the election was surrounded by controversy from start to finish and beyond.

Always-Expanding Justice

It would be impossible to pinpoint *why* the participants saw controversy, race, and the election as manifestations of justice. After analyzing the data, I found myself filled with regret, wishing I had prodded them more, and asked again and again, "explain to me how you see justice as controversial?" or, as primarily concerned with race, or as related to the Presidential election. Perhaps if I had asked *more* questions it would have become clear. And while it is true that if I had asked more questions the participants probably would have answered them, revisiting the theory that informs this project reminded me of two things. First, all interview responses (and all speech) is a type of performance, not a representation of a hidden or repressed "true self" that might emerge from participants if we ask enough/the correct questions (MacLure, 2003; Tobin, 2000). Second, as Bakhtin (1981) reminds us, all speech is composed of cobbling together the languages and logics we have brushed up against over the course of our entire lifetime. Thus, while a participant may be able to explain *why* they used a particular word, that explanation, too, would be just another layer of echoes reverberating from innumerable discourses always, already circulating. So, while a follow-up project which interrogates all of the words participants associate with justice would be fascinating, it is not the work of the present study.

Regardless, I still argue that the fact that these particular words: *controversy*, *race*, and the *election* were bound up with justice at this particular moment for these particular White, women[35] teachers has meaningful implications. These associations

[35] As discussed in Chapter 4, the participants' self identification as White women was a meaningful force shaping the ways that they characterized justice throughout the study. Certainly powerful discourses around

could signal that the complicatedness surrounding the concept of justice is much more broad-reaching than the theoretical and scholarly differences in definitions of justice that I discussed in Chapter Two, as the term comes to stand for numerous other ideas and associations for different individuals in different spaces at different times. In other words, conceptualizations of justice circulating in schools and classrooms are not restricted to well-trodden theories like culturally responsive pedagogies, anti-oppressive education, or multicultural education. Conceptualizations of justice are always in flux among not only these theoretical bases, but are also constantly being impacted by international, national, and local sociopolitical events and individual school cultures. Thinking back to a question posed previously in this dissertation, *what do we talk about when we talk about justice?*, it seems the answer is always in motion, always expanding, and always growing, making a scholarship of justice-oriented work in schools more and more elusive, messy, and complicated.

being White, women teachers in the southeastern United States were shaping the ways that they characterized justice throughout this chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

VERY WELL THEN, WE CONTRADICT OURSELVES

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Whitman[36],1993, p. 113)

These lines from Whitman's (1993) "Song of Myself" come to my mind often. Each time a politician or celebrity is called out in the media for contradicting past statements they have made, I think of Whitman, and I wonder why I have not yet heard someone wrapped up in such a scandal respond with, *"very well then, I contradict myself/I am large, I contain multitudes."* Perhaps they do not respond this way because they have not yet read Whitman, or perhaps it is because dominant theorizations of subjects as stable suggest that contradiction indicates some sort of change or problem and

[36] I worried about including Walt Whitman here. After all, he does not belong to the late modernist/ postmodernist age that has guided most of the literature I have used to frame this dissertation. The poem used to introduce this chapter was published originally in 1855. And yet in so many of his poems, he writes about multiplicity and excess and not-exactness in such brilliant ways. Further, the publishing history of *Leaves of Grass* (which contains his most famous poem, "Song of Myself") seems particularly fitting for this project. During his lifetime, Whitman published six (arguably seven) editions of *Leaves of Grass*, each with considerable variation -- different poems, different versions of the same poems, different appendices, etc. (Gailey, 2006). Thus, including Whitman in this dissertation which deals so heavily in not pinning down ideas to singular meanings feels appropriate.

that the natural state of human beings is more or less cohesive and unified (St. Pierre, 2000).

However, thinking with poststructural theorists like Foucault (1978; 1988) and Bakhtin (1981; 1990) allows researchers to think very differently about tensions and contradictions that emerge in speech. Tobin (1999) elaborated:

> Individuals' utterances reflect not just inflections and vocabulary they've picked up along the way, but, more significantly, the worldviews, concerns, and prejudices of the communities in which they've lived. Bakhtinian theory teaches us that the utterances of individuals are most usefully understood as expressions of the perspectives and tensions of their larger society. Because societies are made up of heterogeneous points of view, the speech of individuals necessarily will contain contradictions. (p. 144)

In other words, the ideas that come up in an individual's speech can be read as echoes of arguments they may have encountered throughout their lives in various communities. Thus, when tensions or contradictions surface in language, they can be seen as possible indications of larger tensions in the discourses and contexts to which the participant has been exposed. Considering this idea of exposure to voices and arguments is particularly interesting in the present era. In earlier time periods, the discourses shaping an individual's talk may have been more-or-less geographically bound. However, the presence of global news media and social media means that individuals may be echoing both ideas they brushed up against in community contexts, but also via online sources (Ranschaert, 2020; Van de Merghel, 1999).

In this chapter, I will focus on spaces in the data where participants contradict themselves. However, I am not highlighting contradictions or inconsistencies in the participants' speech as a means of criticizing them. My argument is not rooted in undoing or correcting the contradictions, but rather acknowledging them as both a normal part of the way teachers talk about justice and as a way to read broader conversations circulating about justice. Pointing to contradictions and messiness is a move that is firmly rooted in the poststructural theories that inform this project. Britzman (1995) explained that "poststructuralist theories disrupt any desire for a seamless narrative, a cohesive identity, or a mimetic representation" (p. 232) and that "every telling is constrained, partial, and determined by the discourses and histories that prefigure, even as they might promise, representation" (p. 232). In other words, in a poststructural project the task is not to create a story or representation of who a participant is and why they think the way that they do, but rather to take their speech and open it up to observe the multiple discourses that may be functioning within it. For the purpose of this project, looking closely at contradictions relatesyd to justice in the participants' spefech allows me to think about both how the participants are responding to ideas of justice and what discourses surface in their responses.

Analysis Methods

The focus of this chapter is different from the other findings chapters in this dissertation. In the rest of the findings, I focus on particular words and ideas that surfaced in multiple participants' dialogue and use those repetitions as ways to consider the broader discourses that might be operating in their speech. The work of discourse analysis, though, is not only concerned with tracing powerful socio-cultural ideas, but

also with staying very close to smaller texts to consider how the language within them is operating (MacLure, 2003). In this chapter, I call on the work of Hong et al. (2017) in tensional analysis to look closely at particular moments in the interview and focus group texts.

Tensional analysis is grounded in Bakhtinian theory and asks researchers to focus on key moments rather than entire texts, looking at moments where "dynamic tensions exist" (p. 26) in order to unpack "conflict between different discourses that come into play" (p. 23). To identify such places of tension, I conducted close readings of all of the interview and focus transcripts and pulled out instances in the transcripts in which the participants' talk around justice seemed to contradict itself or contain tensions. I defined contradictions as moments where the participant stated two ideas that stood in direct opposition to each other, such as a participant who noted, *"I want to be a teacher who talks to kids about real problems in the world and real issues of equity"* and later explained, *"I'm not sure it is my place to bring in topics that are not covered in the standards."* I defined these statements as a contradiction because the participant noted *both* the importance of going beyond the standards to address real-world issues *and* reticence to stray from the curriculum outlined in the standards. I defined moments of tension as places where the participants' comments did not necessarily contain direct contradictions but instead seemed to be wrestling with multiple ideas. For instance, one participant explained *"Justice is really hard to define I guess. It is about doing things equitably and acknowledging where students come from but in a way that treats everyone the same. I'm not quite sure."* In this response, the participant indicated that they were not certain how to reconcile differing ideas about justice in a straightforward way. Thus,

rather than a moment of contradiction, I marked this as a moment of tension. In total, I found over 120 examples of tension and contradiction across all of the transcripts. However, some of these instances were somewhat drawn out in that during a focus group in January a participant may have contradicted a statement they made in a previous focus group in September. Poststructural discourse analysis acknowledges that the participants' subjectivities were always in flux and shifting in response to the particular discourses to which they were exposed in particular moments. Thus, I did not see it as productive to focus this analysis on contradictions that took place over the span of several months. Instead, in this exploration, I have included only examples where contradictions surfaced in short excerpts of speech over the course of a single conversation with a single participant. In this way, I hope to illustrate the way that contradiction is happening in all manner of speech, even over the course of just a few minutes. Contrary to much qualitative research, which seeks to find patterns and create logic in the data broadly, ultimately flattening it, my goal is to isolate particular comments and dive deep into thinking about what these utterances – when examined close up – can help us think about the notions of justice that are normalized and commonsensical. By highlighting and digging into tensions and contradictions, I argue that we can gain a more complete image of the complexity of becoming a justice-oriented teacher. Focusing on contradictions in the speech of a single participant precludes the ability to make broad generalizations about the experience of teachers, but it allows for a consideration of teachers as embedded in a complex and competing landscape of discourses.

Justice is Colorblind/Justice is Systemic

In this chapter, I focus on one White, woman[37] participant whose discussions of justice were particularly laden with moments of tension and contradiction. By centering the responses of one participant, I am able to draw attention to the way contradiction operates in her responses in both overt and more subtle ways. Then, taking seriously Bakhtin's (1981) assertion that contradictions in language are not a sign of confusion or flaws in logic, but rather indicative of larger competing social discourses, I use the contradictions in her speech to propose connections to circulating ideas that may function to shape her speech.

Toward the beginning of the school year, I conducted an individual interview with the participant, who identified as a White woman working in a school in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area. At the beginning of her individual interview, I asked her, "*What do you think about when I say the word 'justice'?"* She responded by describing several ideas about justice that she attributed to different influences in her life:

> *I mean I was taught at a very young age not to see color, not to see gender, not to see anything but the person. And so I think that is still really important and it shaped a lot of how I view the world. My parents have really instilled in me just to be a good person and to treat people like they're good people, no matter who they are or where they come from. Then I just think that like a lot of what we did at [the university] in our teacher education program made me think a lot about*

[37] As described in Chapter 4, part of the context for the participants' utterances is their identification as White women. Discourses of whiteness are present in this participant's responses and the particular nature of the contradictions in her speech are indicative of broader narratives about whiteness in teacher education that merit additional, separate exploration.

> *certain topics like race that I haven't really thought about or that I hadn't really thought about in a long time. I think that's just because I haven't dealt with it personally. Mostly that's with the, like, the racial issues going on, I think that's just made me think deeper about my experiences and what my role is. I realize that I can't understand what they go through on a day-to-day basis. I realized that I'm never going to be a person of color so I can never really understand what they go through. But I think it's my job to educate myself on how long they've been oppressed and the way that they've been oppressed and what I as a White female and an educator can do about it. Um, so I think it's just made me think deeper about, like, my role as a teacher in an education system that was basically founded on racism and basically founded on segregation.*

When asked about how she thinks about justice, the participant first articulates that she was taught "*not to see color, not to see gender."* It is significant that these are the two ways of thinking about justice that came to her mind first: justice as connected to race and justice as connected to gender. While race and gender are identity categories that are certainly connected to histories of discrimination and oppression, they are not the only types of (in)justice. Thus, it is meaningful that these particular subjectivities are what first came to mind when the participant is asked about justice. It is also notable that she seems to set up her response to the question as a narrative of sorts, beginning with the influence her family and upbringing have had around ideas of justice and then continuing through her teacher education program to the present day. She did not say that her previous thinking about justice was replaced by new ideas and concepts she learned. Instead, she

noted that what she learned about "*not seeing anything but the person"* is "*still really important*" in how she approached the world and conceptualized justice.

The participant went on to talk about her teacher education program specifically as a place where she was made to "*think a lot about certain topics like race that [she] hadn't really thought about in a long time...because [she hadn't] dealt with it personally."* Here, she seemed to begin complicating the idea that she did not need to see color or gender because she was pointing out that the fact that she had not "*dealt with [race] personally*" meant that she could not "*understand what they [people of color] go through on a day-to-day basis."* This language seems to suggest that race is a factor in how individuals are treated and can be a cause for "*oppression.*"

Finally, the participant highlighted that the "*racial issues going on"* made her think. The language of "*racial issues going on"* is similar to language that many other participants used to describe police violence, the murder of George Floyd, and the Black Lives Matter protests in Summer 2020. Other participants referred to this set of circumstances as "*everything that is going on*," "*the stuff with race that has been happening*," and "*the racial problems*." This type of phrasing is striking in its lack of specificity. It does not attribute the events of the summer to a particular agent – they do not refer to police violence or systemic oppression – but rather just characterize the events broadly as concerned with race. The "*racial issues going on*" prompted the participant to "*think deeper about my role as a teacher in an education system that was basically founded on racism and basically founded on segregation."* In this statement, she was not only recognizing the existence of racism and segregation but also describing that the entire educational system was borne of those oppressions.

In her comments, the participant seems to draw on two different structural understandings of racism – that racism can be erased by seeing everyone as the same *and* that racism pervades the very organization of schools. Her comments about *"not seeing color or gender"* appear to echo discourses of colorblindness that circulate widely. Such discourses follow a logic that acting justly means seeing all people as equal or the same, rather than recognizing differences based on identity categories (e.g. Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Gordon, 2005, Lee-Johnson, 2019). Those who take up colorblind positions argue that seeing all people as the same equates to putting everyone on a level playing field and not allowing prejudices or biases to cloud one's treatment or expectations of others. However, many others reject and critique the colorblind stance, stating that artificially erasing identity categories assumes a level playing field that does not exist due to very real systemic and structural barriers for historically marginalized populations (e.g. Feagin, 2013; Feagin & Barnett, 2004; Gladwell, 2008). Scholars who forward structural understandings of oppression contend that although legislation may have been passed to integrate society and schools in the United States, legacies of segregation still impact Black and Brown Americans in harmful ways. Further, biases against Black and Brown Americans continue to impact the ways that important decisions in society are made.

In seemingly calling on these contradictory discourses, colorblind dismissal of difference and acknowledgements of systemic barriers due to difference, the participant's comments also bring into focus differing schools of thought on racism as something which exists on the individual level or as something that is systemic. She shared that she became aware of these ideas of racism and justice in different spaces. Her views on colorblindness came from learning from individuals – her parents – about what it meant

to be a good person in the world. This idea is thinkable because this particular kind of colorblindness is concerned with how individuals treat one another. By contrast, her increased awareness of racism and the embeddedness of schools in structural racism came from her engagement with broader communities and movements: through her teacher education program and through national publicization of racial justice movements. Thus, a dynamic emerges which demonstrates a tension between the individual's role in racism and broader culture's role. For teachers in particular, this dynamic reveals a tension in how individuals may come to understand justice and how they - as teachers - are positioned in conversations about justice. They are both individuals in relationships with the students in their classrooms and members of a broader educational system with a complicated historical legacy.

In the interview, I did not ask the participant to articulate *why* she brought up these two contradictory ideas, and even if I had, a Bakhtinian (1981) conception of language tells us that while our words are echoes of other discourses we have encountered, we may not be able to neatly trace them to their source. Further, their sources may be multiple, intersecting, and complex. However, just by looking closely at the particular words she used to describe justice illustrated the contradictions and tensions that the term contains for this individual (and perhaps for the field of education more broadly).

Curriculum is the Priority, Justice is the Priority

Next, I asked the participant to respond to a series of vignettes[38] that depicted White fictional teachers enacting practices rooted in various concepts of justice. The contradictory responses relating to justice continued as the participant worked her way through the vignette prompts. Specifically, she offered inconsistent responses to whether or not issues of justice should be addressed explicitly with students in the classroom. These comments first appeared when I introduced Vignette E. In this vignette[39], the fictional teacher chose to delay starting the curriculum at the beginning of the school year so that he can spend a few days allowing students to reflect, write, and talk about their city's Black Lives Matter rallies as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. After reading, I asked the participant, "*What do you think about the actions the teacher took in this vignette?*" She responded:

> *There are some things I like in this one and some things I would tweak. I hadn't really thought about the students living in isolation needing a chance to communicate their feelings. So that is eye-opening to me. But I don't know if I would push back curriculum. I think the best thing would be to integrate it into the curriculum, maybe with data sets or statistics in a math lesson or something. I just wouldn't want to postpone the curriculum and get behind. And it might make me uncomfortable how parents might respond to having conversations instead of learning, so I have to be very careful in the way we go about certain topics.*

[38] The vignettes were further described in Chapter Four and the full text of the vignettes can be found in Appendix B

[39] The full text of the vignettes is available in Appendix B. Additionally, this vignette is discussed further in Chapter Nine.

In this response, she indicated that giving students a chance to talk about their feelings is an *"eye opening"* idea she had not previously considered. However, she would not want to push back the curriculum. Instead, she proposed incorporating current events into math problems. She gave two reasons for this choice: first, a concern about getting behind, and second, a worry about how parents might respond to forgoing the curriculum in order to tend to students' feelings.

The participant's remarks following Vignette E stand in contrast to her response to Vignette F. In Vignette F[40], the fictional teacher enacted justice-oriented work by teaching character lessons around traits like grit and resilience to her class of largely-historically-marginalized students. The fictionalized teacher in the vignette saw this as a productive strategy to help her students cope with and overcome prejudice and marginalization. The participant responded to this vignette as follows:

> *I feel like I would probably go the opposite route. I would want to have the conversation with students about what you are seeing in schools. What are the ways you see discrimination in schools and then asking students, 'Okay, what can we do about it? What can make it better? What hurts it?' If we have these conversations with students and then ask them what they think is in their power to change it, or you can even ask, 'What should teachers do? What should principals do?' You know, teaching goes further than just teaching the material, that it goes to teaching people how to be just and be in a society.*

[40] Which can be found in Appendix B

Here, the participant expressed that teachers should have conversations with their students that not only explicitly address issues of justice but also that encourage student resistance and a reconsideration of school structures and policies. She specifically referenced having conversations with students that urge them to name where they see discrimination in schools and to theorize ways that they the students, the teachers, and the administrators could enact meaningful change to counter that discrimination. Further, she stated that *"teaching goes further than just teaching the material"* and must necessarily involve *"teaching people how to be just and be in a society."* In this excerpt, unlike the first one, she seemed to suggest a commitment to breaking down inequities in schools and engaging students in conversations about social change, even if those conversations stray away from the curriculum.

These contradictions in the participant's discussion of justice in schools took place over the span of only a few minutes. Thus, much like Whitman (1993) suggested, she appeared to "contain multitudes" (p. 113) of ideas regarding how to be a justice-oriented educator all at once. In the excerpts presented in this section, the participant seemed to embrace two contradictory notions of what teachers should and should not do to attend to justice in their teaching. First, in her response to the fictional teacher focusing on Black Lives Matter at the beginning of the school year, she stated that the primary task of a teacher is to cover the curriculum. Then later, when discussing the fictional teacher who focused on grit, she explained that the work of the teacher is to teach students to question injustice and work for a better world. Like in the earlier examples relating to colorblindness and recognition of systemic injustice, in these responses, the participant stated *both* that she should not explicitly address justice in her classroom--because she

should prioritize math content and is concerned about parent response--*and* that it is important for teachers to guide students to recognize, discuss, and work against injustice in schools. A very direct contrast exists between her assertion that it *"isn't appropriate to push back the curriculum to talk about justice"* and her statement that "*teaching goes further than just teaching the material, that it goes to teaching people how to be just and be in a society*."

Again, taking seriously the task set before us in poststructural conceptions of discourse, these contradictions are not read as shortcomings of the participant or as a space to open up criticism of her commitment to justice-oriented education. Instead, these instances are opportunities to observe the "multivoicedness of language" (Tanggaard, 2009). As a result, one possible understanding of the contradictions which surfaced in this participant's responses to the interview questions and vignettes is that she has been exposed to discourses that seem to contain contradictory ideas. Previously in the chapter, I described colorblind discourses that may also be surfacing in this participant's utterances. Additionally, this participant discussed the idea of prioritizing curriculum over other conversations in the classroom. One possible way of reading those comments is as an enactment of multiple circulating arguments, including the ideas that teachers should focus only on curriculum (e.g. Rochester, 2017) or that they should prioritize addressing issues of justice (e.g. Alvarez, 2019) or preparing students to be citizens (e.g. Kahne & Middaugh, 2015). While we cannot be certain that these discourses are informing the participant's talk, there do seem to be parallels between her speech and arguments which have circulated more broadly. Looking at how these contradictory discourses seem to function in the participant's responses allows us to consider how

being positioned between such different ideas makes the possibility of action in justice-oriented teaching complicated and, perhaps at times, impossible.

Contradiction, Ambiguity, and Justice-Oriented Teacher Education

This participant was, of course, not alone in referencing contradictory ideas around justice in her talk, as Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that any human's communication is naturally laden with contradiction. Each of the participants articulated some contradictory ideas around doing justice work in schools in the interviews and focus groups. In this chapter, I have presented some of these instances of contradiction for several purposes. First, I wanted to acknowledge these contradictions as natural elements of speech that are endlessly entangled in other discourses emanating from other spaces and other moments. Second, I sought to unpack some of those contradictions in order to provide some insight into the competing pressures that teachers face as they work to be justice-oriented.

While it would be possible to critique these participants' responses as ambiguous and representing that they lack a clear understanding of justice, I argue that the issue at play is more complicated. Like Whitman (1993), the utterances of these participants "contain multitudes" (p. 113). Further, I assert that the contradictions in their speech are not simply the result of justice-oriented teacher education being a field which lacks clear definitions (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) but rather a result of "the pain, the conflict, the unpredictability, and the irrationality that are unavoidably implicated in teaching and learning and in teachers and learners" (MacLure, 2003, p. 170). The data included in this chapter suggest that the confusion and contradiction that emerges in the participants' talk about justice is indicative of the discursive landscape in which they are teaching and

learning. Taking seriously the work of tensional analysis (Hong et al., 2017), the varied and contradictory statements are indicative of larger circulating discourses that contradict and conflict with one another: ideas about colorblindness and systemic injustice, about prioritizing curriculum and prioritizing justice. In the chapters that follow, I point to particular words and ideas that circulate in the speech of multiple participants in order to gain insight into how these teachers are positioned in larger narratives about teaching, learning, and justice. However, prior to those engagements, it was necessary in this chapter to highlight the contradiction and tension that emerged across the data.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ASPIRATIONAL JUSTICE TEACHER

> *The wood duck, a richly colored bird, emerald, amethyst, carnelian, with black and white markings, is incomparably more beautiful than the much-overrated swan, a serpentine goose with a dirty neck of yellowish plush and a frogman's black rubber flaps. (Nabokov, 1989, p. 184)*

In *Pale Fire,* Vladimir Nabokov (1989) demonstrated the limits of form, much like the other authors described in this dissertation. In the book, he presents two texts: a 999-line biographical poem written in strict heroic couplets accompanied by a sprawling, rich set of footnotes which, rather than commenting directly on the poem, tell the mysterious story of the downfall and exile of the king of a fictional European nation. Compared to the colorful and engaging footnotes, the strictly organized and structured poem reads as flat and uninteresting. This contrast could be read as an attempt to illustrate a critique of modernist literature, which is overly concerned with form, in favor of postmodern literature which rejects the emphasis on form and perfection and embraces less perfect but more lifelike representations.

While the excerpt I used to open this chapter, describing the beauty of the wood duck, may seem random, I read it as one of Nabokov's (1989) most direct critiques of the emphasis on perfection and form. In some high modernist art, and especially in Spanish-language modernist poetry, the swan came to represent perfect art: pure, large, pristine, and aesthetically beautiful (e.g., Darío, 1999). In describing his preference for the *"richly*

colored" wood duck over the *"much-overrated swan,"* (Nabokov, 1989, p. 184), Nabokov seemed to be suggesting that texts which contain the color and messiness of experience are more beautiful, more preferable than those which attempt to represent perfection.

In this dissertation, I forward a similar argument to Nabokov's (1989) ideas about wood ducks. Instead of merely presenting what a justice-oriented teacher should be and illustrating the imperfections of my participants in contrast to those ideals, I argue that a much more productive project is illustrating the complexity and imperfection of the process of becoming a justice-oriented teacher. Thinking about the contrast between reality and ideal feels especially important in this chapter, where I illustrate how the participants in the project described the characteristics of the type of justice-oriented teacher they aspire to be and then how they distanced themselves from these descriptions. The contrasts between who the participants felt they *should* be and what they felt they could be in their real schools and classrooms became particularly evident in their responses to the elicitation vignettes I created for this study. In this chapter, I will begin by explaining how I used the ideas of discourse analysis to approach the participants' characterization of the type of justice-oriented teacher they aspired to be. Then, I will illustrate two characteristics of justice-oriented teachers that surfaced in the participants' speech. Finally, I will illustrate some of the ways that the participants distanced themselves from this aspirant vision of the justice-oriented teacher and gesture toward some ways that their discussion of what justice-oriented teaching should look like could be rooted in broader discourses circulating around justice-oriented teaching.

Analysis Methods

In order to contextualize this work, I will describe the vignettes and then explain how I employed discourse analysis to illustrate the participants' characterizations of the types of justice-oriented teachers they aspired to be. In their speech, the participants frequently created a tension between who they described a justice-oriented teacher *should* be and who they stated *they could* be in their classroom. These two visions typically stood in tension with one another. Across all six participants, the image of who a justice-oriented teacher should be, the justice-oriented teacher the participants aspired to be, was fairly consistent.

There is difficulty in analyzing discourse in live speech (Fadyl & Nicholls, 2012); much work in poststructural discourse analysis focuses on documents that have been written with intention and planning. Interviews, of course, read quite differently than documents. Throughout our conversations, the participants drifted in and out of topics, sometimes bringing up ideas that were not necessarily related to justice-oriented teaching, but which were generally on their minds. For this reason, the issue of selecting and bounding my data was particularly important. In this chapter, I am focusing specifically on the vignette elicitation interviews that took place during September of the 2020-2021 school year. The participants had been teaching for over a month when the interviews took place. The vignettes portrayed six fictional teachers who each engaged in practices they defined as justice-oriented. After each vignette, I asked the participants a series of questions, such as "*What do you notice about this vignette?", "What is this teacher doing to promote justice in their classroom?"* and *"What issues, if any, do you see in what this*

teacher is doing to promote justice in their classroom? Would you do it differently?"[41]. Thus, this data seems to be connected to the broader question of understanding how the participants responded to various approaches to enacting justice-oriented teaching in classrooms.

In order to analyze how the participants characterized a justice-oriented teacher, I focused my analysis on the actions of the fictionalized vignette teachers that the participants responded to positively and those they responded to negatively. For instance, when I asked, *"What is this teacher doing to promote justice in the classroom,"* many of the participants pointed to particular actions they saw as beneficial, often framed with statements such as "*I liked how the teacher decided to change their plans to be responsive to their students"* or *"It is good that the teacher added more diverse books to the classroom library."* By contrast, when I asked *"What issues, if any, do you see in what this teacher is doing to promote justice in their classroom? Would you do it differently?"*, the participants tended to respond in two interesting ways. First, some participants indicated critiques of the teachers in the vignettes, with comments such as, *"I think this teacher may be stereotyping his students in this example"* or *"I understand why the teacher might add in study hall time, but it seems like it would cause a lot of problems."* Second, some participants noted ways that they might act differently were they in the same position as the fictional vignette teacher. For instance, even if a participant indicated that the actions taken by a teacher were positive or beneficial, some noted that they did not feel they could act in the same way with comments such as *"I couldn't do this in my school,"* or *"I might do it differently."* In these ways, the

[41] The full protocol for the elicitation interviews can be found in Appendix C

participants' responses to the fictionalized teachers in the vignettes seemed to indicate the actions and characteristics of justice-oriented teachers, actions and characteristics they described as flawed or problematic, and the ways they positioned themselves in relation to those actions and characteristics.

To analyze their responses to these teachers, I pulled out all of their responses to the vignette teachers and sorted their responses into three categories: what they saw as positive, what they saw as negative, and how they positioned themselves with regard to the teachers' choices. I then looked across those categories to note which ideas seemed most powerful to the participants. In this work, I analyzed a total of 108 responses because each of the six participants answered three questions in response to six vignettes. In this chapter, I focus on the ideas that were most prominent in those responses: the idea of the justice-oriented teacher as knowledgeable, which came up in 31 responses, the idea of the justice-oriented teacher as vocal, which came up in 42 responses, and the participants' distancing of themselves from justice-oriented teachers, which came up in roughly 36 responses[42].

Attention to how participants frame who they saw as the type of justice-oriented teacher they aspired to be is important because it draws attention to circulating discourses about what it looks like to do justice-oriented work in schools. In order to ensure that I was drawing upon data where the participants discussed *justice-oriented* teachers rather than just *good teachers*, I focused my analysis on the moments where the participants were directly responding to the justice-oriented actions of the fictional teachers in the

[42] Later in this chapter I will illustrate the ways that the participants distanced themselves from a justice-oriented teacher not only in explicit comments but also in smaller asides. Thus, it is more difficult to precisely enumerate this type of response.

vignettes, because these were the primary places all participants responded to, celebrated, and critiqued various approaches to justice-oriented practice in the classroom. A few examples of those places in the vignettes are when one teacher, for example, added in additional study sessions in an attempt to close the achievement gap, another teacher engaged students in conversations deconstructing power structures in schools, while another incorporated diverse texts in the classroom--all representing varied, real approaches to teaching that are described as justice-oriented. In analyzing the participants' responses to the vignettes, I noticed particular characteristics that they described again and again as desirable for justice-oriented teachers. First, the participants continually responded positively to teachers who were vocal in their engagement of justice-oriented practices. The second characteristic of justice-oriented teachers emerged when, after reading all of the vignettes, I asked the participants which approaches they felt they could enact in their classrooms. Overwhelmingly, they described themselves as not knowledgeable enough.

While the participants did not all use the precise words "knowledgeable," or "vocal," I will illustrate how I traced these common threads in their language. To do this, I invoked scholars who have done work in poststructural discourse analysis. MacLure (2003) defined particular questions that those who analyze discourse may consider as they approach data. One of these questions is how the text "carries the scent" (p. 86) of a particular institution or idea. In other words, even if a text does not invoke the precise language of a particular authoritative source or discourse, it may gesture toward that discourse through shared ideas or logics that are more subtle. This makes sense when we consider that subjects are typically not *knowingly* calling upon discourses in their

utterances. Instead, these discourses are shaping their language in ways that are typically imperceptible to the speaker. For example, if I were to say something like "Stella is one of my good, quiet kids," I might be echoing broader discourses connecting to goodness in the classroom being associated with silence and obedience, which suggests that "badness" in the classroom is connected to being loud or expressive in the classroom. Althusser (2014) described this process as interpellation: a subtle way in which individuals come to internalize broader cultural values as their own. Thus, I draw on the language and logics of the participants' speech to connect their words to larger ideas around being *vocal* or *knowledgeable*. In addition to connecting the participants' speech to the ideas of being *vocal* and *knowledgeable*, I will call upon the idea that speech is inherently citational (Althusser, 2014; Bakhtin, 1981; MacLure, 2003) to suggest some possible ways that those characteristics connect to broader discourses around justice-oriented teaching.

The Aspirant Justice-Oriented Teacher as Vocal

Most often, the participants described being a justice-oriented teacher as being vocal about one's beliefs and views on issues of injustice with students in the classroom. In what follows, I will highlight the moments where the participants describe this aspect of justice-oriented teaching. One of the clearest places where tensions between benign vocal and being subtle emerged was in the participants' responses to Vignette A, reproduced below:

> Over the summer, Teacher A read several news stories relating to police brutality and increased violence against Black Trans folks. He then realized that the books he had his students read, the historical events he focused on, and the scientists and

> mathematicians he highlighted as trailblazers were overwhelmingly White, cisgender, heterosexual, and male. As a result, Teacher A commits to remaking his classroom library so that the main characters are reflective of the racial and ethnic makeup of his students and include many LGBTQ+ individuals.
>
> When the school year begins, Teacher A does not make a point to highlight his new books or to explain the reasoning behind the changes to his Scientist of the Week, he simply integrates these books and practices into his lessons. However, he feels proud that his students can now see characters and historical figures who may be more like them being celebrated in the classroom.

The vignette describing Teacher A was written to be an example of how a multicultural approach to justice (Banks & Banks, 1994) might be taken up by a teacher in a classroom. The decision Teacher A made not to disclose that he created a more diverse classroom library or brought diverse historical figures into his curriculum intentionally served as a meaningful prompt for the participants to consider how they conceptualized the role of the justice-oriented teacher: as one who was subversive, enacting just practices and pedagogies without drawing attention to them? Or as vocal, directly explaining to students how injustice was perpetuated in classrooms and curriculum and working to counter those practices with more just ones?

The participants' overall response to this vignette seemed positive and connected to practices a few wanted to employ. For example, one participant said "I *think it is amazing that he is trying to incorporate multicultural literature in his classroom. That is something I am trying to do as well*." Another said, "*I like that Teacher A noticed something about himself and his classroom and made a change as a result. Adding*

diversity is good." However, some tensions arose when the participants discussed the teacher's choice not to be vocal about the purpose of these changes to his classroom.

After reading the vignette, I asked the participants "*What issues, if any, do you see in what this teacher is doing to promote justice in his classroom?"* Overwhelmingly, the participants expressed criticism of his choice not to draw attention to the books and historical figures he introduced. For example, one participant explained:

> *I really like what this teacher did, but he should have mentioned the new library and the things he added to the room and explain why he made that change. He doesn't have to harp on it, but maybe just say something at the start of the year about how it's not just the White people who can do things worth learning about and reading about. So that's clear.*

This participant described that the teacher should have discussed the reasoning why he made changes to his classroom library, highlighting that in his discussion he needed to make clear that people who are not White can do things that *"are worth learning about and reading about*." She made the caveat that the teacher "*doesn't have to harp on it*," or repeat his explanation again and again. In this way, she suggested that the teacher needed to acknowledge his choice, but also that there is a point at which focusing too much on why he incorporated diverse figures could become excessive.

Other participants also criticized Teacher A's choice not to explain why he remade his library and changed the Scientist of the Week. One explained:

> *Honestly, he should have talked about why he made the change. Otherwise, what's the point?*

Similar to the first participant, this one articulated that the teacher should name why he made the changes he did to his classroom library. She asks, "*What's the point?"* if he does not explain to his students the reasoning behind his choice. In this way she seemed to suggest that making a classroom more multicultural may *only* be significant if the teacher emphasized the reason for the inclusion of diverse figures, that somehow the action of building a diverse library does not matter if it is not explicitly discussed. These participants did not articulate that there are any risks or drawbacks to the teacher disclosing his choices. Although there is some nuance in their responses, each points out that the preferred action for Teacher A is to be vocal in declaring why he took the actions he did in his classroom.

Other participants expressed their critique of Teacher A in more complex ways, indicating that while being vocal about his choices might be the correct thing for the teacher to do as a justice-oriented educator, they understood his decision not to do so. One explained:

> *I can really relate to the teacher not calling their choice out. It is scary. I think that is how I would do it as well, but it would make me feel guilty, not being loud and proud.*

This participant identified that she would likely act similarly to the teacher in the vignette, making changes to her classroom but not vocally calling them out to students. However, interestingly, she stated that making this choice would make her feel guilty, because she should be "*loud and proud*" about her choices in the classroom. She also described that one thing that might prevent her from being vocal about justice-oriented changes in her classroom is fear because "*it is scary*" to bring attention to such

commitments. In this response, a tension emerges between the desire to be vocal and enact a particular version of justice-oriented teaching and the sense of fear and vulnerability which comes with the choice to be vocal.

In response to Teacher A, another participant expressed fears that prohibited her from being vocal about her justice-orientations in the classroom. She described the teacher she wished she could be, explaining:

> *Obviously I want to be the person that stands up on top of a desk and screams at them all, 'Yes! Black Lives Matter!' and that they need to be nice to each other and be accepting and all of these things. But I'm not there. I can't do that at this school. And so, I'm trying to do it in little ways. In different ways. But it doesn't feel like enough. It's just the only way I can do it in the space I'm in now without getting in trouble. I can't be that teacher.*

Here, the teacher explained that the way she would like to enact justice-oriented education is to vocally declare to her students by standing on the desk and screaming that she supports efforts like Black Lives Matter and that they should too. However, she then articulated her perception that her school's context keeps her from being able to be the teacher who takes those actions without "*getting in trouble*", summarizing that could not be the teacher she wanted to be.

To follow up, I asked this participant if there were ways she felt that she *could* express her justice-orientations in the classroom, and she replied:

> *So there are a few of my students that will wear like Black Lives Matter t-shirts or some of them have these really cool Black Lives Matter Masks. And I always make it a point to be like 'Hey, that's an awesome shirt,' or 'I love your mask,'*

things like that. So they know that I see them and I think it is great. So I try to do that instead.

Here again, a tension begins to surface between the participant's characterization of how she should act as a justice-oriented educator, standing and vocally proclaiming her stances, and how she felt she could act given her context, subtly complimenting a student's mask.

In their responses to Teacher A, the participants expressed critique of a teacher who chose to subtly incorporate multicultural texts and figures in the classroom, rather than vocally naming the reasons for doing so. However, some of the participants expressed that they could understand why Teacher A might make the choice to *not* be vocal, given their own anxieties about '*getting in trouble*' if they explicitly took justice-oriented positions in their classrooms.

The Aspirant Justice-Oriented Teacher as Knowledgeable

The participants often described a justice-oriented teacher in terms of knowledge, explaining that in order to confront issues of justice in the classroom, one should have a wealth of knowledge about both current and historical events and pedagogical strategies to facilitate conversations around social issues with students in the classroom. In their responses, participants tended to distance themselves from this description, implying that they did not possess such knowledge. After presenting the vignettes, I asked each participant whether they felt comfortable having conversations around issues of justice in their classrooms. Several participants described that a barrier to having these conversations was not knowing enough. For example, one participant explained:

> *I don't feel educated enough to be a teacher who opens up those conversations about real-world things, things outside my content, especially with the election. So, I'm not going to bring it up. I wish I could.*

Here, the teacher contrasted *"real world"* topics with her content, articulating that she felt underprepared to discuss that which lies outside the boundaries of her academic discipline. The language that she wished she could be a justice-oriented teacher who brings up topics unrelated to her content also may suggest that while she could not begin those conversations in her current setting, she aspired to become that type of teacher in the future.

Another participant echoed a similar idea:

> *There are conversations I might not want to get into because I'm not capable of facilitating it yet. But I don't think my students are unable to handle it. I think what limits me is knowing how to ask the right questions. I think I might not need to know everything about a topic if I knew how to ask the right questions so students could get something out of the conversation. It is important and I don't want to do it wrong or say something wrong.*

In some situations, participants indicated that what prevented them from discussing issues of justice in the classroom was that those topics were not age-appropriate for their students. Here, though, the participant stated that it was not her students who were unable to handle conversations about justice, but rather that she as the teacher was not yet prepared to facilitate those conversations. She noted that because conversations around issues of justice are incredibly important, she does not want to say something wrong or make a mistake as a result of being underprepared. Like the previous participant who

used the language of *wishing* around being a particular type of vocal justice-oriented teacher, this participant stated that she is not capable of facilitating conversations around issues of justice *yet*, suggesting that while she may not possess those skills at the moment, they are something toward which she aspires.

Still another participant explained:

> *I don't feel totally comfortable. I don't think there are any topics that are too controversial. I think there are some that I would have to be more careful in how they're addressed than others. I'm a thoughtful person anyway. So like, with science and stuff that I kind of wing it sometimes when I teach, if I know the content. But as far as like deep topics like that and justice stuff, that's not something that I would just want to talk about on a whim or wing, which I know sometimes you have to do, if it comes up like randomly in a class, but that would be something I would want to put a lot of thought into before I just randomly brought it up in class. I think that's true pretty much for any controversial topic.*

As described in Chapter Five, this participant associated conversations around justice with "*topics that are too controversial*". While she expressed comfort being able to "*wing it*" with science content, she does not express the same ease around "*deep topics like that and justice stuff*" that might arise in the classroom. Thus, she did not feel comfortable having conversations around justice topics without first preparing "*because [she] would want to put a lot of thought into it before [she] randomly brought it up in class"*. Like the other participants described in this section, she noted that becoming a knowledgeable teacher about issues of justice did seem possible for her, but she was not yet confident enough in that knowledge.

In each of these situations, the participants described that in order to be confident discussing topics of justice in the classroom they needed to be more knowledgeable, whether that was knowledge of specific topics or issues or knowledge of how to facilitate conversations, both of which are incredibly important knowledges for teachers to have. While some participants, like the last one above, indicated that they could access the knowledge they needed to facilitate these conversations with advanced notice, others stated more broadly that they simply did not know enough yet. Regardless of whether or not the participants characterized this knowledge as attainable, it is noteworthy that they all seemed to identify a tension between the knowledge needed to be a justice-oriented teacher as something different from or outside of the other knowledge required for their teaching. In other words, the participants contrasted knowledge of their content area with the knowledge required to enact justice-oriented work in their classrooms.

The idea the participants articulated, that there are specific types of knowledge that teachers must possess: knowledges of both content and pedagogy, seems to parallel broader conversations in teacher education about Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Pedagogical Content Knowledge is "the knowledge of, reasoning behind, planning for, and enactment of teaching a particular topic in a particular way" (Gess-Newsome & Carlson, 2013), and scholars of pedagogical content knowledge insist that it requires both knowledge of pedagogy and content that are separate but also intimately connected. In 2017, Dyches and Boyd critiqued the idea of Pedagogical Content Knowledge for not acknowledging the political nature of teaching and for not connecting pedagogical content knowledge to justice. Thus, they forwarded the concept of Social Justice Pedagogical Content Knowledge, which posits that to be justice-

oriented, teachers must have deep knowledge of social justice discourses, theories, histories, and pedagogies that inform all pedagogical decision making. In this study, the participants' repeated statements that they do not yet know enough, both about content and pedagogy, to lead conversations about social issues in their classrooms may suggest the importance of frames like Social Justice Pedagogical Content Knowledge to guide teacher educators in connecting the various knowledges of teaching explicitly to the pursuit of justice in the classroom.

Relationship with the Interviewer

The participants' relationship with me as their interviewer also brought about some interesting tensions regarding who they expressed they *should be* as justice-oriented teachers. Prior to our focus groups and interviews for this project, I taught the participants for two years in their teacher education program. The courses I taught had an explicit justice orientation. At the beginning of each semester, the preservice teachers signed a statement of commitment which included "taking a critical inquiry stance by questioning the world as it is and how it could be different with a commitment to action towards social justice and equity" and "seeing people, organizations, communities, cultures, and systems as assets." In class, we focused on intersectional justice, attending to issues of race, social class, ability, gender, and sexuality, among others. We contextualized our work in the idea that all schooling occurs within a network of systems that often serves to perpetuate oppression. Further, preservice teachers read from numerous texts which were firmly rooted in critical and anti-oppressive approaches to education, such as Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2012) *Is Everybody Really Equal* and Kumashiro's (2015) *Against Common Sense*. In the participants' responses during interviews and focus groups, small comments

and asides indicated how they were positioning me with regard to their answers to interview and focus group questions. For instance, participants would make comments such as *"I know we learned this in class, but I haven't figured it out yet,"* or *"I'm sorry. I hope you're not judging me."*

In *Discourse in Educational and Social Research*, MacLure (2003) wrote about some of the common forms of artifice that make up interview research. She criticized that much qualitative research seems to "attempt to get research subjects to do, or say, what we think they would have said or done if we researchers had not been there" (p. 157). She argued that the search for something pure or essential about the research subject, or the belief that what the research subject is saying represents some sort of truth is naïve at best. What is really happening, she asserted, is that research subjects are "routinely play[ing] with personae and levels of reality…putting on masks, staging little research dramas in which they pretend, or believe that they are 'unveiling themselves', only to reveal (and conceal) further simulations" (p.157). In other words, all subjects in conversation, but especially research subjects, are engaged in various types of performances. They are conscious of the fact that they are being interviewed and this mediates the language they use and the words they share. In the case of this particular project, it mattered that I was the one interviewing them, because I was likely associated with particular ways of thinking about and enacting justice in the classroom that the participants encountered in their teacher education program.

Just as the participants distanced themselves from the justice-oriented teacher they aspired to be because they did not see themselves as vocal or knowledgeable enough, they also used language to suggest a divide between who *I* thought a justice-oriented

teacher was and themselves. Typically, this came up in small, apologetic, or self-deprecating asides, such as when I asked participants, "how are you addressing issues of justice in your school and classroom?" In response to this question, one participant began with language of apology:

> *I'm sorry. I wish I was better about the justice stuff. It is just so much right now. It feels like everything is constantly changing and falling apart, I can hardly teach at all.*

Here, the participant seemed to refer to the chaos of the 2020-2021 school year, when students, teachers, and schools were oscillating between in-person and online instruction as virus cases spread. She explained that everything that is going on in the school and in the world more broadly made her feel like things were "*falling apart*" and preventing her from teaching, much less teaching justice. However, she also used language of apology, possibly indicating that I must be upset or disappointed with the fact that she felt so overwhelmed and thus unable to focus on intentionally pursuing justice-oriented practice.

In response to the same question, another participant responded,

> *I'm so sorry. I'm just not. I just think this entire year is a growing year and a getting by year. That's how I feel but maybe that's wrong too. I'm saying all the wrong things. You're like – what did I spend two years teaching her?*

This participant described that she was trying to spend the year learning and "*getting by*." Beginning teaching in the 2020-2021 school year, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers expressed that the best they could do was to get through the year (Cardoza, 2021). However, this participant apologized for expressing the difficulty of the year and her need to just get by. She explained that "*maybe that's wrong*" and that

"*she is saying all the wrong things.*" She then describes that she perceives that I, her former teacher, and current interviewer, must be thinking that I had wasted my time teaching her.

Toward the end of another participant's interview, when I asked if there was anything else she wanted to discuss, another participant stated,

> *You must be so disappointed when you hear us say that we aren't talking about justice at school.*

Like the other participants who used language of disappointment or apology for not being more direct and intentional about their justice-oriented work, this participant assumed that I would be disappointed if she was not having specific conversations around justice in her classroom. One possible way to read this presumption of disappointment is that she perceived me as expecting her and her prioritize justice-oriented work and to do so in a very particular way, by explicitly having conversations with people in their schools about issues of justice. Of course, this response is thinkable. After all, throughout the interviews and focus groups I asked numerous questions about whether and how they were seeing and discussing issues of justice in their school environments. Further, they spent two years enrolled in courses where I explicitly worked with them on how to enact justice-oriented pedagogies in the classroom. Despite my attempts to approach our conversations (and this data) non-judgmentally, these questions, coupled with my position as their former instructor, could understandably have functioned to make the interview process feel like a sort of inspection or evaluation of their enactment of justice-oriented teaching in their first year in the classroom.

As a final example, when I asked one teacher what she thought being a justice-oriented teacher in the classroom looked like, she responded:

> *All of this is so hard. I don't have an answer. I wish I had an answer. Do you have an answer? You must have the answer. I'm so embarrassed.*

This participant indicated that she was embarrassed because she could not answer a question which she assumed I had an answer to. One possible way to read this interaction is that this participant may still position me as an authoritative voice, as her instructor whose task for the past two years was to evaluate her assignments and *"have the answer."*

While the examples offered above are more direct, this type of apologetic and embarrassed language came up on many additional occasions, typically in short statements of *"I'm sorry"* or *"Is that right?"* after many of their responses. The participants' comments to me, often characterized by guilt or apology, may reveal the ways that their experience of justice-oriented education in their university program continued to function as they entered the classroom, influencing how they characterized that they *should* be conducting themselves as justice-oriented teachers. This language of apology and disappointment suggested that they carry the ideas from the program with them and that they recognize a tension between the messaging from the teacher education program and their experiences in the classroom.

I felt strong reactions to these statements. I wanted to intervene and tell them "*Of course that is not the case*." I wanted to tell them that this work is always complicated, and is only complicated further by the particular context in which they were entering the teaching profession. I wanted to tell them that the whole purpose of this project was the

fact that this work, this concept, is messy and confusing. However, as a researcher I was fascinated by how my presence as the interviewer was functioning for these participants. Their language suggested that I was associated with their teacher education program and with the very particular image of a justice-oriented teacher that was constructed for them in that program. The justice-oriented teacher as one who is vocal, one who is knowledgeable. The justice-oriented teacher who prioritizes direct conversations about situations of injustice, who deconstructs oppressive structures. The justice-oriented teacher who knows the answer, who knows how to lead difficult discussions, who always *knows what to do.*

Wrestling with Justice Aspirations

In this chapter, I examined particular moments in the interviews that provoked teachers to respond with what it meant to be a justice-oriented teacher. Through their responses to both the elicitation vignettes and my interview questions, particular commonalities about what being a justice-oriented teacher looked like seemed to surface. When discussing Teacher A, who subtly changed his classroom library to be more diverse, the participants emphasized that he should have been vocal in explaining the reasoning behind his choices to his students, discussing how members of marginalized communities are often excluded from the texts and curriculum found in schools. Additionally, when asked whether they saw themselves as capable of having conversations around justice-issues in their classrooms, several participants responded that a lack of knowledge prevented them from being a teacher who could facilitate such conversations. In this way, an image of the justice-oriented teacher as one who is vocal and one who is knowledgeable seemed to appear.

However, many of the participants also distanced themselves from those descriptions of an aspirant justice-oriented teacher. For some, this distancing was articulated through statements that they felt they could not be vocal in their current school setting because it might lead to losing their jobs. For others, they felt that they did not yet know enough to be able to do justice-oriented work in their classrooms. The participants further distanced themselves from who they seemed to think a justice-oriented teacher *should* be in the ways they framed their responses to me, their interviewer and former teacher, with language of apologies, disappointment, and embarrassment.

While I did not directly ask the participants *why* they felt a justice-oriented teacher was knowledgeable and vocal, or *why* they assumed I was disappointed or unhappy with their teaching, it is worthwhile to consider some possibilities for what types of discourses seem to correspond to what the teachers said.

First, the ways that the teachers responded to my presence in embarrassed and apologetic ways could indicate that the image of a justice-oriented educator that they took from their teacher education program was someone who was vocal, "*loud and proud",* and did not fear the repercussions of their choices to explicitly engage students in conversations around issues of injustice in the classroom. Because I am familiar with the texts and lessons that the teachers received over the course of their teacher education program, I can confirm that often we did advocate that they "teach boldly" (Fehr & Fehr, 2012), even reading texts such as "how to teach without getting fired" (Salas, 2004). The assignments they completed also aligned with the explicit justice-orientation of the program, asking them to write lessons with a justice focus, read books connecting their content areas to justice-oriented concepts, and thinking critically of the embeddedness of

schools within oppressive systems. The dominant discourse that circulated in the teacher education courses I taught celebrated teachers and pedagogies that directly addressed oppression and explicitly promoted movements toward justice.

Further, for three semesters, our class took place in the Media Center of a local middle school. At that school, Black Lives Matter posters hung in the hallways and teachers directly engaged students in conversation about power and oppression. The brilliant and self-proclaimed justice-oriented Media Specialist with whom we worked engaged students in book talks about novels that featured youth from LGBTQ+ communities, youth of color, and youth with disabilities, among others, always advocating for students to be more inclusive. It is possible, then, that these texts, interactions, and experiences were acting to further form an image of what it means to be a justice-oriented teacher in the minds of these participants. Additionally, engaging in interviews and focus groups with me, their former teacher educator, could have functioned to influence how they were characterizing their actions with what they perceived to be my expectations of them.

Beyond the influence of their teacher education program, in the summer of 2020, immediately before these teachers entered the classroom, voices and images of engaged, activist educators circulated widely. Specifically, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and throughout the Black Lives Matter uprisings in the summer of 2020, news and social media websites were flooded with resources from educators encouraging teachers to talk about systemic racism and police violence in their classrooms (e.g., Ferlazzo, 2020; Proulx & Shulten, 2020). The messaging of some of these articles, posts, and stories was that teachers had a responsibility to make the world a better, safer place,

especially for their Black students, and that *not* showing vocal support was equivalent to perpetuating oppression (Capatides, 2020). While we cannot be certain that these particular participants interacted with any of this media, its prevalence in the period immediately following their graduation from their teacher education program and immediately preceding their first year teaching means that it could have been accessible to them.

There is much to be said about how teacher educators produce the idea of what a teacher should be and about the ideas from teacher education programs that continue to affect teachers as they enter the profession. Certainly, there are brilliant teacher-activists and advocates for justice who engage students in incredible conversations around current and historic issues of justice, encouraging knowledge and activism. I would argue that having more of these educators in schools would be immeasurably good for children. However, it is worth considering whether justice work is only vocal, or if it is work that can be done more subtly, more subversively. Further, there is value in exploring how teacher education programs intentionally or unintentionally center particular representations of justice-work and what the implications of those moves might be. Could centering this particular version of vocal, bold justice-oriented teaching paint the work as too inaccessible for teachers, especially new teachers? Or, is this the only way justice work can be done and thus it is the vision teacher preparation programs must insist upon? In the following chapter, I will illustrate the way the participants describe a fear of community backlash in response to their teaching in order to further illustrate some of the competing pressures and tensions that teachers face in working to enact justice-oriented teaching.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SPECTRE OF COMMUNITY BACKLASH

School board reprimanded a fourth-grade teacher who had kept a copy of This Book Is Anti-Racist *by Tiffany Jewell in her classroom library following complaints from a mother who said the book violated her family's 'morals and faith.' (Hixenbaugh, 2021)*

Parents claimed a teacher at the school was showcasing students' art when administrators allegedly asked for one piece to be removed after a parent complaint. The artwork features a rainbow with the words, 'Gay is OK' written underneath an umbrella. When the teacher questioned the decision, parents claimed an administrator allegedly compared the art to hanging a Nazi flag in the classroom. (Perez, 2022)

Matthew Hawn is accused of insubordination and repeated unprofessional conduct for lessons and materials he used to teach about racism and White privilege in his Contemporary Issues class at Sullivan Central High School in Blountville, Tenn. (Pendharkar, 2021)

As I gathered and analyzed data and wrote this dissertation from fall 2020 through winter 2022, news story after news story was released detailing the ways teachers and students across the country were being disciplined for addressing issues of oppression

and justice in their school settings. In Texas, books were removed from classroom libraries and teachers were disciplined. In Georgia, student artwork supporting LGBTQ+ people was likened to Nazi symbolism. In Tennessee, a teacher was fired for teaching lessons that acknowledged the existence of racism and White privilege. More and more stories filled each day's news: firings, suspensions, disciplinary actions, public shaming. Beyond the highly publicized incidents, there were numerous others occurring in communities across the United States. There were teachers who did not lose their jobs, but who did face pressure to conform in particular ways to what the most vocal members of the school community were demanding for their children's education.

These events were not only important to the context of this study; they have become central to the findings of the study. As Voloshinov[43] (1976) theorized, the way we understand an utterance is always wrapped up in context. In other words, it is necessary to consider the contexts in which language is written and spoken, as language can never be removed from its context. These stories and many more were developing and surfacing around me and the participants as we discussed issues of justice over the 9 months we spent together. These events were present in their speech. Thus, it would be impossible to write this dissertation as though these contexts did not exist. While I cannot make any certain claims about the specific discourses shaping the participants' speech, it is important to consider the multiple contexts in which our discussions were taking place.

In Chapter Seven, I discussed the ways the participants distanced themselves from the image of the idealized social justice teacher and cited their comments about not being vocal or knowledgeable enough to do justice work in their classrooms. In their speech,

[43] While it is not known for certain, many scholars postulate that Voloshinov is actually a pseudonym used by Bakhtin. (Tobin, 2000)

the participants also noted other forces they saw as limiting their ability to be justice-oriented teachers. The most notable and frequently cited of these forces was the fear of the idea of community backlash and losing their jobs.

Analysis Methods

In order to consider how this community backlash was functioning, I conducted multiple close readings of the transcripts from the individual interviews and focus groups to identify moments where the participants discussed their school communities connecting or responding to justice-oriented teaching. I defined these moments as times where the participants discussed how community members responded to their actions as justice-oriented teachers, where they discussed how community members responded to the actions of other justice-oriented teachers (at their own school or elsewhere), or where they noted that their anticipation of how community members might respond was informing their justice-oriented teaching in their classrooms. In total, I found 65 moments in the transcripts where the participants alluded to community responses to justice-oriented teaching. Some of these were longer-form answers, like those highlighted in this chapter, while others were brief asides such as a participant who noted *"I'm not sure how parents would like that"* in response to a vignette in which a teacher was asking students to comment on oppressive systems within their own school. After highlighting moments in the transcripts focused on community response, I then engaged in Bakhtinian text mapping (Tobin, 2000) to ascertain what types of discourses might be functioning in these types of response. Bakhtinian text mapping is a process in which a researcher reads a particular excerpt of text to trace out allusions or references to broader discourses which may be shaping that piece of text. While this analysis process might read as somewhat

structuralist, Threadgold (2000) argued that “when we practice poststructuralist discourse analysis, we inevitably need to do some of the same things that older structuralist and linguistic methodologies also do, albeit with a different understanding of why we do them" (p. 40). In other words, to do poststructuralist discourse analysis, sometimes we must sift through and categorize the data, but not for the purpose of reducing the data to simplified narratives. Instead, this allows researchers to see and open up the data in new ways in order to imagine how particular expressions are made possible in the context of the present moment. For the purpose of my project, this practice allowed me to consider what discourses were circulating during the time I spent discussing justice-oriented teaching with them.

In this chapter, I will present the ways the participants characterized community backlash and being fired as possible consequences of engaging in justice work in their classrooms. Then I will propose some ways their emphasis on these ideas could be indicative of discourses related to teacher neutrality as well as the context of the present moment.

Twin Fears: Community Backlash and Being Fired

Early in the school 2020-2021 school year, some participants began talking about how the justice-oriented work they learned about in their teacher education program was regarded as problematic in their school settings because it might upset community members resulting in backlash. As an example of this tension, I draw attention to the following response that a participant gave during our September focus group, already noting the ways that the spectre of parent and community backlash constrained her ability

to enact justice-oriented pedagogies in her classroom. I asked her, "*have you had any conversations about issues of justice in your school?"* To which she responded:

> *My biggest thing is how our entire program centered around social justice and all of those things. And our instructional coach, like explicitly told me a couple of weeks ago, like, "you don't teach social justice, you teach social studies." […] So I know I can't talk about it.*
>
> *Interviewer: Did the instructional coach tell you why?*
>
> *Participant: She thinks it is a battle that is not worth fighting with parents and everything. Which I disagree. But oh well.*

In her comment, the participant drew a contrast between topics of *"social studies,"* her content area, and *"social justice."* She was able to discuss social studies, but not social justice, in her school setting. When I asked why she could not talk about social justice in her classroom, the participant responded that the instructional coach saw it as *"a battle not worth fighting with parents."* This comment highlights two important dynamics at play. First, invoking the language of a *battle* suggests tension and confrontation associated with discussing justice in the classroom. Second, the battle that is of concern is with parents. Thus, it is fear of the parents in the school community that are functioning to constrain discussions of justice in the classroom.

This discourse of fear was very real for many of the participants. During our first focus group meeting, for example, I asked the participants if they felt comfortable addressing issues of justice in their classroom. Immediately, one participant responded,

> *It is just not a conversation I can engage in if I want to stay employed. I mean it [the threat of losing my job] is so real here. I try to talk about it, but the students*

> *don't talk about things I can appropriately respond to. At least I haven't figured out how to without putting my job at risk. I don't know. I have mouths to feed at home.*

The participant describes that having discussions about issues that individuals in the school community might see as controversial could lead to her losing her job. She highlighted her own financial precarity and the fact that losing her job would have significant impacts on her ability to care for her family. Thus, this participant characterized a choice between doing justice-oriented work and being employed.

Another participant echoed similar ideas:

> *I want to talk about justice because I feel like I have this like obligation to teach my kids to be decent human beings. But also like, I don't want to get fired. So it's so hard to find that middle ground, I don't know. Do I just like hope that eventually they find it on their own?*

This participant described wanting to engage in justice-oriented teaching because she felt an "*obligation to teach my kids to be decent human beings"*. However, she stated that the risks were too great. Instead, she mused that perhaps the best she could hope for is that her students eventually "*find it on their own*".

These first two participants situated their decisions to not engage in justice-oriented/controversial topics with their students in the possibility of losing their jobs. In explaining their reticence to openly pursue justice-oriented practice, other participants shared stories they had heard where teachers had been disciplined or fired as a result of engaging in what the participants saw as justice-oriented topics. One teacher told a story of a teacher in a nearby county:

> *I know that knowing my students and knowing the parents and the community that I can't put up, like a Black Lives Matter poster in my room. And that totally stinks. My hometown is like 45 minutes away from here. And like one of the teachers had a Black Lives Matter magnet on his filing cabinet at the beginning of the year. And at open house, one of the moms took a picture of it and posted it on like the County Conversations[44] Facebook page, such a waste of energy. But it spread like crazy and the whole community came out, like trying to get him fired and all this stuff for spewing his political views.*

This story is noteworthy for several reasons. First, the mechanism of community backlash was a Facebook page where a parent posted a picture of the teacher's classroom. Second, as the community outrage grew on the Facebook page, the fact that the teacher had a magnet displayed on his filing cabinet became equivalent to "*spewing his political views*" in the classroom. The participant here described this Facebook controversy immediately after stating that she knew her "*students and knowing the parents and the community."* That knowledge, alongside the idea that an action as seemingly small as displaying a magnet on a filing cabinet could lead to community-wide calls for a teacher to lose his job, served as a meaningful constraint on what the participant stated was possible in her own classroom.

In response to the same question, a different teacher told a story that came from her own school community:

> *About a month ago there were several students in the ELA class who made jokes about George Floyd and everything that went on with that. The teacher addressed*

[44] This group has been given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity of the participant and her community.

> *it right away and she could tell there were kids who were clearly uncomfortable, but they didn't want to deal with the controversy. So they just didn't say anything. And one poor girl, she didn't even come to school the next day. She said she was sick, but I think it's because she was anxious to even be around people who would joke about that kind of stuff. It was very awful. And the teacher gave the students punishment for making those jokes. But then the next day the parents [of the students who made the jokes] called the teacher and were yelling at her, asking 'Why would you do that?' and causing a big scene, saying they didn't understand why it was wrong and they would get administration involved. And so that's what we're dealing with. So I don't know what I can do without getting pushback.*

In this reporting, a teacher in the participant's school faced pushback from parents when she enforced consequences for students who made jokes about the murder of George Floyd in the classroom. The participant describes the parents "*yelling*," "*causing a scene*," and threatening to "*get administration involved*," potentially resulting in some sort of disciplinary action toward the teacher. Notably, the teacher depicted in this story is not leading the class in a conversation about police brutality or displaying paraphernalia that might indicate her stance on Black Lives Matter or other *controversial* issues; she merely reprimanded a group of students for making jokes about the slow, painful murder of a Black man by a White police officer. After telling that story, the participant stated that she *"doesn't know what she can do without getting pushback,"* indicating how the results of her coworker's actions impacted what she saw as possible in her classroom.

For the participants in this study, stories like these operated as cautionary tales, denoting the boundaries that exist for engaging in conversations related to current events,

especially those related to justice. If the communities these teachers were a part of called for disciplinary action for the acts of displaying a magnet or correcting an inappropriate joke, it is reasonable that other teachers would presume that explicitly engaging students in lessons or discussions related to issues of injustice could be grounds for the same community backlash. In what follows, I will walk through some of the topics the participants defined as too dangerous to bring up in the classroom, as well as how they saw this pressure of community backlash impacting their teaching, before offering an exploration of circulating discourses that might make these reactions thinkable.

What Is too Dangerous

As I analyzed the data, I paid particular attention to which topics, events, or ideas the participants defined as too controversial or risky to discuss in the classroom[45]. In the first half of the school year, whenever I asked participants about discussing issues of justice in their classroom, they tended to focus their responses around the November 2020 United States Presidential election between incumbent Donald Trump and Senator Joe Biden. One participant, who taught in a rural school, mentioned her school's policy to "*stay neutral*" in each of our focus group meetings. In a focus group that occurred the week before the election, I asked *"how are issues of justice coming up in your school?"* In response, she described a faculty meeting:

> *At my school, they shy away from any sort of controversy. I mentioned this earlier, but they keep reminding us to stay neutral, stay neutral, stay neutral. And then even today in our faculty meeting, they were like, just remember as elections*

[45] It seems important to reiterate here that when I asked questions about justice, the participants often responded by talking about politics, controversy, race, or the election, as I outlined in Chapter Five.

> *come up, you like, you cannot share your views, you must stay neutral. Parents are going to be calling if they find out that you shared something, that's the least bit different than what should have been said ...and so it's very different. Like we don't have a space to share. My kids don't either like they never talk about anything controversial.*

The administrators at this school repeated again and again that the teachers must "*stay neutral*" and not discuss anything that could be perceived as sharing their own ideas and opinions around "*any sort of controversy*." However, similar to the stories described earlier in this chapter, the mechanism for enforcing that teachers "*stay neutral*" was the threat of parents who would call if teachers shared anything that strayed from what "*they should have said*." Here, the discourse of neutrality and the threat of parent backlash functioned such that teachers *"don't have a space to share"* and students *"never talk about anything controversial."*

A participant working at a different school echoed a similar idea:

> *It's really hard for me to keep my mouth shut on a lot of things, especially related to justice. And that's something that I'm still trying to grasp, like understanding my place. And I don't know it's, it is tricky and I-I'm struggling to find ways, especially, and I, I also mentioned this like last time that the school that I am at, doesn't really provide a space or support to talk about politics at all. Or, um, anything that's controversial. Which isn't actually controversial, but whatever. It doesn't feel like a very safe space in that regard to me.*

This teacher also expressed that the school did not allow for the discussion of politics or of "*anything controversial*," which she qualified by stating that she thought those things

were not actually controversial. This contradiction points to a tension regarding avoiding conversations around justice, politics, and controversy in her classroom. Ultimately, she stated that the classroom is not a *"safe space"* for her as a result.

Throughout our conversations, the participants described some of the topics they saw as too controversial to be discussed in the classroom without fear of community backlash. When asked to *"describe your school setting,"* one participant explained:

> *It feels so different from when I was in school. There are so many important things I can't discuss. I grew up in a really closed-minded town and we still had mock elections before the Presidential elections. I remember voting when I was in middle school and I just feel like it is definitely not allowed here.*

In this statement, the participant described that even opening the space for a mock election in which students might express their preference for one presidential candidate over another was seen as too controversial for her school. She contrasted this to the time and place when she was in school and such mock elections were welcome. She noted that the place that she grew up was *"really closed-minded,"* and still made space for elections, but her current school setting was even more closed-minded such that an election seems an impossibility.

The idea that any space for disagreement is too dangerous was echoed by a participant in another school when she responded to the vignette[46] which described students writing through their responses to the Black Lives Matter protests in Summer 2020 and sharing them in small groups. She said:

[46] The full text of this vignette can be found in Appendix B

> *I think it is good that they are able to write through their feelings. But I worry about the small group, even if it is structured. I'm thinking about some of my students who disagree about stuff politically. I don't think they would be respectful of other spaces and I don't want to make a place for arguments in the classroom. It might cause problems for me.*

This participant described that she would not feel comfortable having students share their written responses to the Black Lives Matter protests with their peers because it might "*make a place for arguments in the classroom*." Significantly, she also noted that those arguments might "*cause problems"* for her, the teacher, as well. While it is unclear whether she characterized arguments as causing problems for her because she could get in trouble with community members/administrators or whether arguments would cause problems because she would be uncomfortable addressing them (or for numerous other reasons), the positioning of disagreement in the classroom as causing problems is notable. Both of these participants characterized any space where students might disagree as too problematic for the classroom – even in the context of a mock Presidential election where students had to express preference for one candidate over another or in a sharing of reflections on current events which students may have experienced in diverse ways.

Eliminating all topics where students might express opinions or disagreements constrains the possibilities available to teachers in the classroom significantly and also could stand to deny students meaningful learning opportunities around constructing arguments and engaging in discussion. In this way, the great breadth of topics, activities and engagements which felt off-limits to teachers in the interest of avoiding community backlash stood to have material impacts on the learning tasks offered to students. In what

follows, I will describe the way the participants characterized the impact that anxieties about community backlash had on their teaching.

Impact on Teaching

The participants responded to the constraints they felt on their teaching in various ways. When asked, *"have any issues of justice come up in your classroom?,"* one participant who taught social studies described her efforts to discuss issues of justice by situating those conversations in other locations. She said:

> *I did something when we were talking about apartheid and then we talked about the bigger picture of prejudice, not just in South Africa but also in general and like prejudice we see every day. I had all my students write about times they've seen prejudice or discrimination and stuff. And then they all had to write like some type of commitment, I guess to also like to disrupt that. The things some of them wrote about were incredible, so that worked. So I felt like that was about justice because some of the kids did see, did connect to like stuff going on in their world right now. I couldn't have them read it or anything because it might offend someone, but I was happy. A few got there.*

In this example, the participant described the way she connected a conversation about prejudice and discrimination to a lesson about apartheid in South Africa. She felt that she was able to engage students around important issues of justice, especially because some of the students connected the content to situations they observed in their own settings. In this situation, while the participant did engage some students in conversations about injustice in their current setting, she expressed that concern about upsetting other students kept her from sharing those connections with the entire class.

Another participant described that she was glad to not have to bring up topics that might make some students uncomfortable, saying:

> *I feel comfortable not having to confront those controversial conversations in a school setting where it would make others uncomfortable. I still think that's something -- like if kids are thinking about justice that's good and they should be. It's just so interesting because in other jobs you're free to share your opinions as you feel. But like with teaching, even with my religion, I can't share some ideas that are a part of my life or the way I view things because I have to have neutrality. And I guess in some ways that makes it harder but in other ways it is so much easier. I can just teach the content. So, there's like a weird tug-of-war going on there.*

This participant described the pressure to remain neutral as having both positive and negative impacts on her experience of teaching. She expressed frustration that she could not share her religious beliefs with her students, but relief that she did not feel obligated to have conversations in the classroom that might make her students feel uncomfortable.

When I asked, "*Do you think your students would appreciate discussions around issues of justice in the classroom?*", a third participant described how she saw the push to exclude controversial issues of justice impacting her students, saying:

> *What's really frustrating is that they [students] won't ever talk about questions that don't have straight answers. If I ask them for facts about the Presidents and stuff they answer right away and they're so excited to talk. But if I ask what they think about something or how they feel, they're silent. They won't answer. And I think it's because they never get to have any real conversations in school you*

know? They don't talk about real life or controversies or things that matter. So I don't know what to do.

In this example, the teacher connects the idea that the students are not having conversations in school about *"real life or controversies or things that matter"* and her students' reticence to respond to questions that ask for their own thoughts or opinions. While there could be multiple reasons that these students are not responding in these moments, it is worth considering the teacher's assertion – that the students only feel comfortable responding to factual questions in the classroom because they have not had the opportunity to grapple with questions that do not have easy or factual answers. Were this assertion true, the spectre of community backlash could be seen as not only keeping conversations about justice out of the classroom, but also meaningfully impeding students' learning.

Much as the competing discourses acting upon teachers are complicated, so too are their responses to those discourses. The participants in this study reacted to the constraints they felt imposed by the fear of community backlash in ways that indicate relief and comfort and also in ways that indicate frustration.

Discourses of the Moment

The pressures that the teachers articulated around the fear of community backlash are particularly interesting when read alongside the ways the participants discussed the aspirant justice-oriented teacher, which I described in Chapter Seven. While it appears that they felt pressure emanating from their teacher education program, and perhaps broader calls to teacher activism to be knowledgeable, vocal critics of unjust practices and advocates for historically marginalized populations, many articulated that they did

not feel they could enact those practices. One of the most frequently referenced justifications for not being able to enact justice-oriented practices in their classrooms was an anxiety around community backlash, and in many cases, community backlash that might lead to losing their jobs. In this chapter, I have offered examples of how participants described this pressure, contextualized it in stories of other educators, and explained its impact on their pedagogies. While of course it is not possible to attribute their responses and attitudes to exact influences, in the section that follows I will outline some of the discourses circulating at the time this study took place that may have been functioning to make the fear of community backlash a reasonable and thinkable reaction for these teachers.

Teachers (and Education) are Politically Neutral Forces

In their school settings, the participants seemed to be encountering a powerful discourse that has circulated in educational spaces for years: that teachers, and schooling, are and should be politically neutral forces (Cherner & Curry, 2019; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Journell 2013; 2017; Kelley & Brandes, 2001). While this idea of neutrality in the classroom and teaching "both sides of controversial issues" has gained significant support in recent decades (West, 2021), scholars have argued that "schools have always been teaching only certain things from only certain perspectives to only certain groups" (Kumashiro, 2012, p. 34). Further, arguments intended to promote neutrality in schools ultimately serve to perpetuate oppressive ways of thinking (Geller, 2020). Cochran-Smith et al., (2009) connect the push for neutrality in the classroom to larger discourses around freedom, the idea that preserving freedom in schools means, "upholding the rights of individuals to adhere to whatever beliefs and values they wish" (p. 636). This

conceptualization of freedom stands in direct contrast to a justice-oriented idea of freedom which is defined as “challenging the inequities in access and opportunity that curtail the freedom of some individuals and groups” (p. 636). These two definitions of freedom cannot be reconciled—just as the participants in this study seem to be unable to reconcile the discourses that were acting upon them to be *both* an outspoken advocate for justice and politically neutral in the classroom.

Hostility Toward Educators

From these interviews and focus groups, the participants seemed to point to an environment where parents and caretakers could act as vocal dissidents of school activities, and that this dissatisfaction is a force that was both stress-inducing and, perhaps, tied to serious disciplinary consequences for educators. The interviews and focus groups that compose this project took place between September 2020 and May 2021. While lawmakers had begun making moves to eliminate discussions of race in classrooms in early 2021, the nation-wide outcry against Critical Race Theory did not begin in earnest until late spring and summer 2021. However, throughout the 2020-2021 school year, stories continuously emerged that painted an atmosphere of contention and outrage in the spaces where school employees and community members met. For instance, news stories covered parents and caretakers protesting school mask mandates or decisions to move to online schooling vocally (Khazan, 2021), even inciting unrest and violence that led to the premature ending of school board meetings (Cottle, 2021). Other stories described moments where parents ripped masks off of teachers' faces in the classroom (Fieldstadt, 2021) or verbally berated them for enforcing policies (Madani, 2021). Similarly angry, violent scenes both in front of school buildings and inside school

board meetings began to erupt as the phantom of Critical Race Theory being taught in schools began to be broadcast by media sources.

While the tensions that the participants in this study discussed were not directly related to Critical Race Theory or COVID-19 policy, they seemed to indicate an environment in which hostility from parents and caretakers was a real fear. Looking broadly at portrayals of interactions between parents and school employees in the media during the 2020-2021 school year, the environment they feared seems to be described again and again.

Teacher Firings in the Media

Numerous stories similar to the ones I used to introduce this chapter have been covered by news media and social media outlets in recent years – teachers who have been disciplined or lose their jobs because of social stances they take in the classroom (e.g. Elassar, 2020; Natanson, 2021). In many of these stories, teachers' actions were publicized on social media, rallying community members to demand action. These narratives seemed to function to discipline the teachers away from engaging in justice-oriented work in their classrooms for fear of losing their jobs in their first year teaching.

It is impossible to definitively say that the participants were calling on these powerful discourses. However, it is worth noting that these discourses (and many others) were circulating during the year that the interviews and focus groups took place, and many of the participants comments seem to carry "the scent" of these ideas (MacLure, 2003, p. 86). Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that the word is always "half someone else's" (p. 294). Tobin (2000) further explains that "because all speech carries echoes of the voices of others, language is inherently citational, hybridized, and double-voiced" (p. 20). In

other words, even if someone is not consciously attributing their words to a particular source, all talk is composed of words and ideas that have been acquired from other sources, constantly combining with the other language that has been collected to form the particular words we speak in a given moment. Thus, while these participants did not directly cite national movements to encourage teacher neutrality, protests in school board meetings, or high-profile stories of teachers losing their jobs, I still argue that these are possible discourses which may be influencing them.

When Shutting the Door Won't Do

During my career in education, I have heard the phrase *just shut the door and teach*, echoed over and over in professional development seminars, conference presentations, blog posts, and teacher education classrooms. If a teacher articulates that they feel their administrators or community would not condone particular lessons, structures, or topics in the classroom, they are often told to do it anyway and see what consequences, if any, befall them. This feels especially true in conversations around justice-oriented work in the classroom. Those educators who are committed to the work see it as incredibly urgent, as the ongoing oppression of so many historically marginalized groups hangs in the balance. It is worth noting here that I count myself among this group. I see the doing of justice-work in schools and classrooms as the most fertile space of possibility for creating change and creating a better world through and for children. While I do not think I have ever actually used the words *shut the door and teach*, (they have always made me uneasy), as a teacher educator I focused on explicit, vocal justice-oriented work as an essential element of good teaching. However, the work of poststructural theories is to "disrupt common sense" (Luke, 1995, p. 20) and to work to

unravel the ideas we see as "natural, given or unquestionable…to open [them] up for further questioning" (MacLure, 2003, p. 9). Engaging in these conversations with the six teacher participants in this project, and then re-reading (and re-reading and re-reading) their comments over the course of my data analysis, bought up questions of what these encouragements to loudly and actively pursue justice-work in the classroom might be *doing* do preservice teachers, especially as they prepare to enter school spaces that may be particularly inhospitable to this work in a cultural moment where community backlash has proven an effective force for encouraging teacher discipline and firings. There is a possibility that encouraging this singular vision of justice-oriented teaching may ultimately position teachers such that the work feels too impossible to enact or consider, as it stands in tension with maintaining their employment.

In our conversations over the course of their first year teaching, a tension surfaced in the participants' talk about doing justice-oriented work in the classroom. They described justice-oriented teachers to be bold individuals who overtly and consistently deconstructed current events and school policies to unearth systemic issues. And yet they could not reconcile this vision with the constraints they felt in their own school communities; they did not seem to feel that they could enact the *justice-oriented teacher* they envisioned and still keep their jobs. It would be easy for teacher educators and others outside of these teachers' classroom and school contexts to say they should just *shut the door and teach* these crucial lessons anyway, and if that means they need to find a new job, so be it. However, this would be ignoring the realities of these teachers. The reality for these teachers is that they are entering classrooms at a moment when many in the country are deeply skeptical of teachers and education more broadly, and further are

willing to take actions to make teachers whose work is seen as problematic or controversial face consequences. For this reason, it is crucial that teacher education programs and individual teacher educators whose mission and goals include cultivating justice-oriented teachers think carefully about how they prepare teachers to do the work within the social and political realities of contemporary US schools.

CHAPTER NINE

THE POWER OF CURRICULUM

> *That evening he thought he was becoming his habits - even more he thought he was becoming the grid he knew. (Waldie, 1996, p. 1)*

D.J. Waldie's (1996) prose poem *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* centers around the post-World War II California suburb where the author was raised and continued to live through the writing of the book. The suburb, Lakewood, is emblematic of a whole host of similar neighborhoods which were hastily constructed in that era (and many more that have been constructed since). The most powerful figure in the book is *the grid*, which taken literally is the system of roads, buildings, sidewalks, and intersections that form the suburb out of a vast stretch of California desert. However, the grid takes on much more power than that: it guides the movements and interactions of the residents of Lakewood, and it provides a logical organization that seems to order the way that they think and perceive the world. The grid encompasses the scope of possibilities that exist for those living in the suburb. Early in the book, Waldie established the history of this particular grid. He wrote:

> *The streets in my city are a fraction of a larger grid anchored to one in Los Angeles. The grid was laid out in September 1971.*

> *The Los Angeles grid is a copy of one carried from Mexico City to an anonymous stretch of riverbank by colonel Felipe de Neve, governor of California.*
>
> *The grid the Spanish colonel carried to the nonexistent Los Angeles in 1781 originally came from a book in the Archive of the Indies in Seville. The book prescribed the exact orientation of the streets, the houses, and the public places for all the colonial settlements in the Spanish Americas.*
>
> *The grid came from God.* (Waldie, 1996, p. 22)

Here, Waldie illustrated the way the logic of this neighborhood, the force which orders his life and the life of the other residents, came from outside of Lakewood, from the minds of other men from other nations, across oceans: men who would never see post-war California. And yet the residents of Lakewood have never questioned it, instead they embrace the logic of the grid, its efficiency and simplicity. The last sentence of this passage, "*the grid came from God*," illustrates the way this logic has become so omnipresent commonsensical to suburban residents that it must somehow be divine in nature, originating from a logic that is beyond human.

Some of the discourses and logics that govern educational structures in the United States are regarded in similar ways. Specifically, in this chapter, I see the curriculum used in schools operating in a way that is quite similar to the grid that Waldie describes. The curriculum seems to be an immutable and omnipresent force that emanates from somewhere beyond the teacher's scope of influence and governs what is and is not possible with regard to justice-oriented teaching.

Analysis Methods

MacLure (2003) asserted that a particularly useful question for opening up a text for poststructural discourse analysis is "where does power reside in this text?" (p. 82). In my analysis, I sought to identify what particular forces and discourses were powerful in shaping the participants' discussions of justice in their school settings. To do this, I conducted several close readings of the transcripts from both the individual interviews and the focus groups. During the close readings, I paid particular attention to the reasons the participants cited for addressing or not addressing issues of justice in their schools and classrooms. I coded each of these reasons and then looked across the data to assess what discourses appeared most powerful in shaping how the participants thought about the possibility of engaging in justice-work in their own settings.

While references to community backlash and losing their jobs[47] were the most common constraining force that the participants discussed in relation to justice work in their classrooms, the second most frequently referenced idea had to do with the curriculum, which came up 49 times across the transcripts. I defined references to the curriculum as moments where the participants referred explicitly to the curriculum, the standards they taught, the content of their classes, their lessons, or their collaborative planning with other teachers. Once I identified these utterances, I took up the task of considering the meanings that became attached to the idea of curriculum for the participants in this study over the course of the 2020-2021 school year. By identifying moments in the transcripts where the participants invoked the curriculum, I sought to open up their words to trace how they characterized the power of the curriculum and to consider from where that power emerged.

[47] Discussed in Chapter 8

To do this, I again employed Bakhtinian text mapping and worked to connect the way the participants talked about curriculum to other discourses that were circulating over the course of the 2020-2021 school year.

In this chapter, I focus on how the participants referenced the curriculum as it related to their justice-oriented teaching. I will begin by outlining how the participants responded to a particular vignette and then offer a few ways the curriculum was referenced in focus groups throughout the school year. Finally, I will offer some possible insights into how and why the curriculum might have been operating in this way for the teachers who participated in this study.

"You Don't Delay the Content"

Constructing elicitation vignettes allowed me to craft particular choices made by teachers in order to see how the participants would respond to them. One such choice had to do with whether or not it was appropriate for a teacher to delay their regular curriculum to have conversations with students they saw as related to issues of justice. This question intrigued me for a variety of reasons, rooted both in history and current events.

Historically, critics of justice-oriented education often argued that focusing on issues of justice in the classroom was problematic in that it weakened the focus on the curriculum and somehow makes school less rigorous and academic (e.g. Crowe, 2008; Ravitch, 2001). In the present moment, a focus on content over all else was particularly interesting as well. Throughout 2020-2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic developed, spread, and mutated, school leaders had to make decisions again and again about how to approach Covid19-schooling (Hughes & Jones, 2021a,b), weighing the safety of students

and teachers against the benefits and drawbacks of remote learning. Numerous voices emerged in news and social media arguing for schools to remain hybrid or virtual in order to protect the vulnerable, and in contrast, still more argued that students needed to return to school or else they would risk falling behind (e.g. Goldstein, 2020; Richards, 2020). Because of these particular events and conversations taking place, I wrote Teacher E's vignette to feature her choice to delay the curriculum in order to discuss both the Black Lives Matter protests and COVID-19 with the students in her class. The vignette read:

> Teacher E is concerned about the trauma her students experienced both as a result of violent police responses to protests in their city and the high number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the community. She is particularly concerned because many students who have been living in isolation may not have been able to communicate about or process their feelings in response to these events.
>
> At the beginning of the school year, Teacher E delays the regular curriculum and instead spends several days asking students to write through their feelings and experiences. She also engages students in structured small group conversations where students are given particular times to speak and to listen. She hopes these experiences will help students who have experienced trauma heal and will also help those who were further away from the protests and the virus understand the impact these events had on other students in their community.

The participants reacted to this vignette strongly. Most stated that it was a commendable idea to have students process their responses to the state of the world at the beginning of the school year. For instance, some said:

> *I like this. A lot of teachers have been concerned this year with kids living in isolation and making sure they don't fall too far behind. But also, it's important to make sure you are focusing on their emotional well-being so they can heal.*

> *I don't know if my students would be comfortable talking about this, but I like that they have time to write through their feelings and experiences.*

> *This seems helpful for kids to communicate their feelings and build up to a whole class conversation. It would be good for students who don't understand to hear others talk about it.*

These participants described seeing benefits to what Teacher E chose to do in the classroom, because it attended to the emotional well-being of the students and allowed an opportunity to "*heal*". Further, the final participant also saw this activity as helpful for those students who may not have experienced the impacts of the movements for racial justice or the COVID-19 pandemic as directly.

However, participants also critiqued the teacher's decision to delay the curriculum in order to engage in conversations around Black Lives Matter and COVID-19. For instance, one participant explained:

> *I guess the idea is good, to support the students and talk about how they feel. But also I just don't see how it is actually going to work. The content moves fast; you can't take a break or the kids will get behind.*

At the beginning of this comment, the participant noted that it was *"good"* to allow students to talk about their emotions. However, soon after she began to express uncertainty about how this approach would actually work. Specifically, she referenced

the speed of the curriculum and that altering the pace of the curriculum could result in the students falling behind. She indicated that teachers *"can't take a break,"* if they want students to remain on-track. Another participant echoed similarly:

> *I'm not so sure. You have to do the curriculum, so you can't just dive into something like this. I don't know how the students would respond either. I wouldn't do it.*

This participant also seemed to express some reticence, stating that she is *"not so sure"* and that she *"doesn't know"* how it would go over with the students. She also emphasized that "*you have to do the curriculum*," an imperative that seems to indicate that the curriculum is immutable. Ultimately, she ended her comment stating that she "*wouldn't do it*" as a result.

A third participant offered a bit more explanation in her discussion of the problems with taking actions similar to Teacher E's in the classroom. She explained:

> *I don't know about this. I think you have to find a way to fit these conversations into your lesson one way or another. But you don't delay the content. You don't put the curriculum off. I mean, I know it is important to have conversations, but there's gotta be a better way than just holding a therapy session in your classroom and not learning what you are supposed to be learning.*

In this brief comment, the participant emphasizes three times the need to stick to the curriculum, stating that "*you don't delay the content"*, "*you don't put the curriculum off."* The language of these phrases is noteworthy, as each is situated as an absolute, a command. Further, she stated that in situations like the one illustrated in Vignette E, students are *"not learning what [they] are supposed to be learning".* In these comments,

the curriculum seemed to function as a powerful, governing force for teachers. If teachers wish to have conversations about current events or issues of justice, the participant suggests that *"you have to find a way to fit these conversations into your lesson one way or another."* Thus, the only way to incorporate justice into the classroom in this participant's logic would be to relate it to the content of the day's lesson.

Additionally, she notes that *"there's gotta be a better way than just holding a therapy session in your classroom".* This statement stood out as a sort of aporia, a thread that I could pull to trace some of the logic of the text made visible. The idea of conversations around issues of (in)justice being akin to "*holding a therapy session*" bears some resemblance to popular critiques of justice-oriented education more broadly. In their review of major critiques of justice-oriented teacher education, Cochran-Smith, and her colleagues (2009) outlined the knowledge critique as particularly powerful. This critique positions justice-oriented education as anti-intellectual because it "place[s] far too little emphasis on traditional educational goals related directly to conveying subject-matter knowledge and basic skills" (p. 628). Critics whose evaluations of justice-oriented education fall into this category go so far as to liken pursuits of justice in the classroom as "therapy" (e.g. Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997, p. 373) because they seem most directly aimed at making students feel better about themselves. While it is impossible to know whether or when this participant may have encountered such arguments, her speech seems to contain traces of the discourse that there is a dichotomy between valuable classroom knowledge and conversations around justice, suggesting that the logic of the knowledge critique is still alive and well, circulating through spaces occupied by teachers.

While echoing traces of the knowledge critique of justice-oriented education seem most prominent in the third participant's responses to Teacher E, it is notable that all of the participants expressed some reticence around the idea of delaying the curriculum in order to have a conversation about Black Lives Matter and the COVID-19 pandemic. As emphasized multiple times throughout this dissertation, it is impossible to know *why* the participants said the things they said in the interviews and focus groups. However, the fact that multiple participants questioned delaying the curriculum seems to suggest a logic that curricular knowledge that is "objective and apolitical" and "testable on standardized tests" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 630) ought to take precedence over other explorations, perhaps including conversations around justice and injustice.

Curriculum as a Constraint to Justice-Oriented Teaching

In the previous section, I focused on how the participants responded to a vignette that illustrated a teacher delaying the curriculum in order to have conversations around Black Lives Matter and the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationship between justice-oriented teaching and the curriculum also came up multiple times over the course of the monthly focus group conversations. Here, I will discuss some of the ways the participants characterized the curriculum and how they described it as constraining their work as justice-oriented teachers.

"Everything is Cookie Cutter"

Several participants explained that they were expected to teach the same content at the same pace as the other teachers in their grade level or on their team. For some teachers, this meant that all of the teaching, including notes, slides, and activities, had to be completely uniform for all teachers teaching the same content to the same grade level.

Two teachers explained that the pressure to keep things "*cookie-cutter*", meaning identical, across classrooms was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One stated that because students were often working in pods[48] with students from other classrooms, any variance in lesson plans or delivery would be problematic or confusing. Another teacher explained that in her school, students were frequently moving between various sections of the same class as they had to go from in-person to online learning due to either isolation because of exposure or illness. Thus, it was important for all of the teachers to stay on track with the curriculum.

The participants responded to the synchronized curriculum in several ways. In some ways, they described it as a bit of a relief, with one stating:

> *So, basically our principal came to us in the beginning of the year and was like, everything has to be cookie cutter throughout, across the entire grade level, which at first was kind of good. Cause I was like, I don't know what I'm doing. So this was helpful and everyone was telling me exactly what I needed to do, but now it's like, I've kind of gotten the hang of things and I'd rather, you know, do different things during class.*

Here, the participant explained that the uniformity in planning from having everything "*cookie-cutter*" provided a comfort at first because she was a new teacher. However, as time went on, she began "*got the hang of things"* and wanted to be able to try other activities and approaches in her classroom. I then asked this participant if she felt like

[48] During COVID-19 Schooling (Hughes & Jones, 2020 a,b), many schools moved all students to online learning platforms. Sometimes, groups of parents would get together to have their students all go to a single location to complete their online learning lessons. These were referred to as pods.

having to plan and teach the exact same way as her colleagues impacted her ability to be a justice-oriented teacher. She replied:

> *There was one time I wanted to have a more controversial conversation[49]. It was September 10th and I was like "Oh my gosh, tomorrow is 9/11." I need to say something or do something in class tomorrow. And so I texted our team leader and I said, "Hey do you guys usually do anything for 9/11? I saw there was a Brain Pop video we could use." I found it when I looked up some videos of kids talking about it and I thought, Oh, it'll take three minutes in my class, I'll do it, it'll be a great idea. And she responded and was like, "No. We don't usually teach about 9/11 in school". So, I asked her what she thought I should do and she said, "Well, we're supposed to all be cookie-cutter. And if the other teachers aren't going to bring up something controversial I don't think you should either". So I didn't and I felt really bad about it.*

This excerpt illustrates one way that uniformity across teams of teachers can function to limit what is discussed in the classroom. When I asked the teacher if she was able to justice-oriented work, she responded by explaining that she was discouraged from talking about a controversial topic like the September 11th terrorist attacks even for *"three minutes in my class"* because the other teachers were not going to talk about it. This resulted in her feeling "*really bad about it*". The participant seems to be constrained by the expectation that all of the teachers on her team would teach the same content, and by her team leader's decision that it was in the best interest of the team to not broach a controversial topic.

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[49] This excerpt illustrates another example of a participant responding to a question about justice with the word "controversial," as discussed in Chapter 5

Other participants also echoed the idea that they were required to do collaborative planning, and as a result, their ability to bring in additional topics or activities was limited. For example, one explained:

> *My whole team has to agree on everything we teach, and I know they wouldn't want to talk about anything that might stray from the content.*

Another stated:

> *I wasn't prepared for collaborative planning, and it's really frustrating that I can't focus on things I think are important, like talking about real problems in the world. There isn't a lot of flexibility with the pacing.*

These participants suggest that the curriculum and the need to teach in tandem constrains what is possible in their classrooms. In the first excerpt the teacher pointed to the other teachers on her team as the ones who would not want to *"stray from the content."* The second participant, on the other hand, noted that it was the content itself that precluded the inclusion of other topics because *"there isn't a lot of flexibility with the pacing."*

In a more extreme example of the unrelenting power of the curriculum, one teacher described a situation in which she was being asked to teach a high school level science class to students who had recently immigrated to the United States and lacked the language skills necessary to grasp the advanced scientific concepts in English. She explained that the class was mandated by the district for all 8th grade students, and when she asked her administrators to make some changes to the pacing of the class to accommodate her students' needs, she was told by her principal, *"They're going to fail anyway, so we may as well expose them to harder content because it is district policy."*

The participant went on to explain that she felt "*guilty that I can't talk about current events or the election or anything with justice because the content just has to go so fast and the kids don't understand it."*

This same participant described conversations she had with parents throughout the school year where she was apologizing for the speed of the pacing and stating that it was out of her hands, as well as sharing her guilt that her students' grades were low and she felt there was nothing she could do about it. She explained:

> *I feel like all the parents think I'm the bad guy. They're always complaining about how low the students grades are and I have to tell them that there is nothing I can do about it. That's just what the curriculum is for the district. And so yeah with all that it feels impossible to do anything to do with justice and stuff too. I just feel so guilty but there's nothing I can do.*

In this situation, the participant described the curriculum as immutable and impossible to change. Thus, to delay the curriculum or to make changes would be to act in defiance of her school administrators.

Each of these examples illustrates tensions that arose when the participants discussed their justice-oriented practice in relationship to the curriculum. In each of these situations, something related to the curriculum was constraining the participants. In the first examples, the participants indicated that they could not bring additional topics, and specifically justice-related topics, into the classroom because they needed to maintain uniform curriculum pacing with other teachers in the school. The final participant described that the curriculum kept her both from incorporating and *"anything to do with justice"* and from meeting the educational needs of her students. Thus, like the fear of

community backlash, the participants described the pacing of the curriculum as a limiting force when it came to incorporating justice-oriented work in their classrooms.

Curriculum and The Grid

As ever, it is impossible to state with certainty the various discourses that may have been operating in the participants' speech over the course of this study. However, I suggest that positioning the curriculum and class content as preeminent in the classroom[50] may indicate resonances of discourses related to accountability[51] and achievement that have long been building stature in education. The discourse of curriculum as supreme and immutable seems to be acting like the grid that Waldie (1996) characterized in *Holy Land*, a rigid system with distant origins that has come to govern fundamental conceptions of what teaching and learning look like.

The prominence of accountability measures in schools (at every level) in the current moment is the result of a decades of reforms and social movements emphasizing the importance of competitiveness, efficiency, and individualism, as well as the idea that students' performance on standardized tests are indicative of their success in school and their ability to compete on the job market (Ambrosio, 2013; Kumashiro, 2012). In this environment, teachers become "inventions of the educational apparatus" (Britzman, 2012, pp. 232-233) or masters of curriculum-product-implementation (Zeichner, 2017).

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[50] I am in no way advocating that curriculum and content should be ignored in the classroom. Of course, learning the content is important. However, I think it is worth asking what, if anything, is important enough to supersede the content for the day. In this study, the participants' responses to Teacher E's choice to delay the curriculum to discuss movements for racial justice and a global pandemic seem to suggest that very little (if anything) is important enough to alter the curriculum.

[51] Again, I am not suggesting that there should not be accountability in the classroom. However, it is worth noting the ways that the constant drive for surveillance, accountability, and uniformity in education is impacting justice work in the classroom.

In other words, the work of the teacher is to implement the pre-designed curriculum in the correct way, and if the student attends to that curriculum in the correct way, they should be successful on their tests, meaning they are successful in their education.

It is important not to criticize teachers who take up the mantle of teaching the curriculum as their task. It should not be surprising that so many do. If they were educated in the United States, underwent teacher education in the United States, and now teach in the United States, they have likely always been surrounded by the idea that mastering the curriculum is the path to mastering the test, and that mastering the test indicates one's success in school.

What is interesting to consider here, however, is that in their teacher education program, these particular teachers learned that engaging students in conversations beyond the curriculum, conversations which connect the content to students' lives and which acknowledge the students' embedment in larger issues, systems, and narratives are important in working toward justice in schools. Thus, when these participants entered the classroom as first-year teachers, they had to grapple with the inclusion of conversations about (in)justice and how those conversations may or may not have intersect with the curriculum. From the data cited above, this grappling became evident. The participants' language indicated a tension around sticking to the curriculum as written and some guilt about not including conversations around justice. However, their responses to Teacher E also seemed to indicate that in many cases the need to keep up the pace of the curriculum, and perhaps in that way fulfill the duty of the teacher, was more immediate and urgent than engaging students in content or conversations that deviate from the standardized, paced curriculum.

Again, it is important to note here that my analysis and description of this data is in no way a criticism of these teachers for not doing justice-oriented work in the *right* way. Instead, I am working to map both how the participants talk about justice and how their talk about justice may be rooted in broader, powerful discourses circulating around them. Poststructural theories allow for this type of exploration, one that does not psychologize the participants but instead seeks to contextualize their speech and to consider how their language becomes thinkable. Thus, this data seems to gesture toward the idea that, as teacher educators, we can model, explain, and provide statistics to support the imperative need for teacher candidates to bring current events and other justice-related topics into their teaching and learning experiences, but our words are only a single "dialogic thread" (Bakhtin, 1981) of the thousands of threads they will brush up against in the world. Accordingly, teacher educators must consider how we are positioning our own teaching such that it prepares future teachers to navigate the realities of the classroom *and* recognize the ways that competing ideas around what it means to teach are always operating on them.

CHAPTER TEN

DENOUEMENT

I am twelve years old sitting in my middle school English Language Arts class. Fluorescent lights. Blue plastic chairs. The grassy smell of Texas springtime lingering on bodies that have just come inside from lunch recess. The teacher passes out yet another plot diagram that we are meant to use to chart the events of the short story we just finished popcorn reading in class. The final line on the chart, which usually reads "*resolution*," instead says "*denouement*." Someone [52], of course, asks what we were supposed to put on that line, we had never learned that word, denouement. The teacher tells us that was the French word for resolution, and it was just the way the template was made.

Denouement, though, is a bit more specific than resolution. Translated from French, denouement literally means "the unknotting." *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (2015) tells us that in a plot, the denouement is where the "complexities of the plot are unraveled and the conflict is finally resolved. In the denouement of a traditionally structured plot, the villain may be exposed, the mystery explained, misunderstandings clarified, or lovers reunited." The denouement is the moment of relief when the chaos of the plot returns to something orderly, digestible, *meaningful*. It often happens the same way in research: the findings are summarized into a few clearly stated points, there is a

[52] Who was not me because I did not speak in class.

call for what could come next, and then a graceful exit. Well, we have now arrived at the final chapter, the denouement of this dissertation. Here, I am expected to resolve the conflict, to explain the mysteries, to clarify the misunderstandings.

Unfortunately, you have entered the wrong project[53]. No such thing can or will happen here. Guided by Lessing (1962), Carver (1981), Foer (2002), Creeley (2008), Nabokov (1989), Waldie (1996), and so many others, I seek to leave you not with a denouement but an opening. By disrupting the traditional forms of their respective crafts, these authors and poets attempted to create something that was more like life, that was closer to the messiness and chaos of the world in which we exist. I have sought to do the same here. The teachers who participated in this dissertation project all attended the same university, they all spent their childhood within a few hours of one another, they all identified as women, they all identified as justice-oriented teachers, they all completed the same teacher education program where they read the same justice-oriented texts and participated in the same justice-oriented lessons. So, shouldn't studying how they thought about justice in their first-year teaching tell us something about graduates from this teacher education program? Or about women? Or about people from their home state? Or about justice-oriented teacher education? Shouldn't there be a message that teacher

[53] Here again, I feel conflict around traditional dissertation conventions. As I approached writing this final chapter, I was filled with a resistance born of anxiety. The analysis I present in this dissertation does not point to one clear conclusion. I worried that perhaps this meant I had found nothing. Despite the years I have spent reading and writing in poststructural theories, insisting on the absence of linearity and the need to question commonsense understandings, I still felt the pull of linear, cause-and-effect ways of knowing. I felt tempted to flatten the complexity and uncertainty out of my work to tell a more easy-to-digest story, one that might fit on a diagram. All of this to say, committing to the work of undoing dominant ways of thinking and knowing is also not a simple, pure process. Instead, it is riddled with the constant need to combat one's own complicity in the structures and logics one resists. It requires us to sit in discomfort and grapple with our resistance to that discomfort.

educators can take home and apply to their practice to unilaterally improve the work being done in the field?

No.

And that is precisely the point.

In this dissertation, I approached the questions: *How do first year teachers respond to multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas of justice operating in schools? What discourses do they call upon in responding?* To consider these questions, I engaged in conversations with six first-year teachers who had recently graduated together from a justice-oriented teacher education program in the southern United States. Our conversations took place over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, a time period that felt especially tumultuous due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced educators to rethink their approaches to instruction again and again as school leaders modified schooling structures to respond to virus spread. Further, over the course of 2020-2021, people in the United States collectively grappled with the ongoing presence of systemic racism following the murder of George Floyd. At the same time, the unrest that resulted from the 2020 Presidential election called into question the very foundations of democracy in the United States, as vocal critics insisted that the election process could not be trusted, ultimately resulting in a deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. While these events bubbled and circulated in the world, these teachers were entering their first classrooms and beginning to establish themselves as educators. Undoubtedly, this complicated context was impacting not only the teachers, but also their students, their administrators, and other members of their communities. Over the course of the year, I engaged the participants in two types of conversations. First, I conducted individual

interviews with each participant. During these interviews, I presented the participants with a set of elicitation vignettes which depicted fictional teachers enacting different types of justice work, rooted in different theoretical conceptions of justice, in their classrooms. These vignettes allowed me to observe how the participants talked about different conceptualizations of justice as well as what types of actions they labeled as justice oriented. Additionally, the participants attended monthly focus groups where they discussed where they saw issues of (in)justice in their schools at the time and how these issues were being responded to. By meeting with the participants over the course of an entire academic year, I was able to observe the ways that the concept of justice was not stationary for these participants – instead, it was constantly shifting and changing, being enabled and constrained by a number of discourses, forces, and ideas. The fact that their talk about justice was constantly in flux was not surprising. Characterizing justice as laden instability and constant change mirrored not only the broader conversations about justice circulating in the literature, but also the idea that teaching and learning are inherently non-linear.

My analysis of the data generated from the interviews and focus groups was rooted in poststructural conceptions of discourse as theorized in the work of Foucault (1978) and Bakhtin (1981; 1990) and enacted in the analysis completed by scholars such as MacLure (2003) and Tobin (2000), among others. At the heart of my analysis was the idea that individuals' utterances are endlessly bound up in broader circulating discourses that make particular ways of thinking and particular statements thinkable and others unthinkable. Thus, my task throughout the dissertation was to consider what the participants were saying about justice as indicative of larger conversations occurring

about justice. Further, I worked to consider what circulating discourses might have made the particular statements they said possible and sensible. In what follows, I present a general overview of the participants' talk about justice over the course of the year.

Summary of Findings

> *Justice is just, I think, understanding or seeking equal opportunity. I guess across all kinds of settings. And there are so many different… I guess you'd say outlets for that, whether it's race or religion or socioeconomic or just kind of anything. It's just understanding, recognizing and making a point to fight for equal opportunity and acknowledgement and advocating for those that need that extra voice. I don't know. It's so hard to define things when justice is not something that can just fit into a little definition. It's just…I don't know. It is so hard. I feel like when I was in school, I had to, over the past couple of years, I feel like every single week in one of my classes, I had to define justice and it was never the same ever. And so it is really tricky, but yeah, I would say, I guess like equal opportunity, not even like equal opportunity, but, I don't know, recognizing the problems and trying to fix it for everybody. I don't know.*

During the individual interviews, before they read the vignettes, I asked the participants to define justice. Most of the participants struggled and remarked, "*that's hard."* However, my attention was most drawn to the words of one of the participants, which are excerpted above. She began by attempting a definition, she talked about *"seeking equal opportunity"* and considering *"race or religion or socioeconomic"* status in order to *"fight for equal opportunity and acknowledgement."* Midway through her

response, though, she began to express some uncertainty. She stated quite plainly that *"justice is not something that can just fit into a little definition"* going on to describe that during her teacher education program she was asked to define justice almost weekly, and the definition was *"never the same ever."* She concluded by beginning another definition before ending, *"I don't know."*

While writing the dissertation I grappled with precisely where to fit this quote. It seemed to fit into every chapter, and yet there was always more happening within it than seemed appropriate for those chapters. Ultimately, while in conversation with one of my mentors, it became clear that this, the idea the participant articulated, was the conclusion of my findings. What became evident through engagement with the data was that *"justice is not something that can just fit into a little definition."* In discussing justice, the participants frequently called upon other concepts or contradicted their previous statements. Further, the idea of justice was *"never the same ever,"* as different concepts of justice and forces enabling and constraining justice became important in the participants' talk at different points over the course of the year. In this way, it was almost impossible to answer my first research question, *How do first year teachers respond to multiple, sometimes conflicting ideas about justice circulating in schools?* in any sort of straightforward way because the way participants talked about justice was itself always multiple, always in flux. While this messiness is reflective of both the slippery nature of the concept of justice and the reality that teaching and learning are inherently laden with complexity and crisis, so often the task of empirical research seems to be to flatten that complexity and erase that messiness to present organized findings which suggest particular interventions. Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to preserve and

articulate the messiness and complexity of the participants' responses. Here, in my conclusion, I will attempt to revisit some of the different ideas about justice that I discussed throughout the dissertation in a way that "resist[s] the rage for clarity" (MacLure, 2003, p. 170) by maintaining complexity and contradiction.

Revisiting the Dissertation Chapters

In Chapter Two, I laid out some of the ways that the concept of justice has been theorized in education literature. I outlined different conceptualizations of justice rooted in liberal, critical, and poststructural theories, offering both descriptions and critiques of some (though certainly not all) of the strands of justice-oriented thinking that have been circulating in education and teacher education literature over the past several decades. Following this exploration, in Chapter Three, I discussed some trends in the empirical literature on justice in teacher education. In this analysis, I pointed to the large quantity of studies that focus on justice as a static, cohesive concept, seemingly avoiding the complex history and context of the term that exists in the literature. Further, a great deal of the studies related to justice in teacher education frame different aspects of teacher education (such as individual courses, program-wide curricula, or innovative practices) as interventions capable of altering preservice teachers' dispositions toward and enactment of justice-oriented work. While I recognize the valuable and innovative work that many of the teacher educators featured in the studies are doing, I also call into question the idea of linear, cause-and-effect learning and suggest that perhaps this model is not reflective of the actual realities of teaching and learning. To conclude Chapter Three, I drew attention to several studies that have engaged with the complexity of the term *justice* as well as the messiness of teaching and learning in order to situate the work I present in the

dissertation. Finally, in Chapter Four, I proposed poststructural thinking around discourse as a productive way to both theorize how participants in the study talk about justice and to connect their speech to broader, circulating discourses.

In Chapter Five, I explored the particular language the participants used in response to questions I asked them about justice. Specifically, I found that in response to questions using the term *justice*, the participants responded by talking about *controversy, race,* and *the election.* These terms were significant for several reasons. First, the tendency to respond to questions about justice using *other* words further illustrates the notion that the concept of justice is complex and lacks a clear, shared definition. Further, it was notable that the terms the participants used to talk about justice did not necessarily align with the ways that theorists and educational scholars have written about justice in the literature elaborated in Chapter Two. Thus, the idea of justice seems to be even more slippery than the extant scholarly literature suggests, as it is woven into myriad other ideas and concepts beyond what scholars have explored.

Chapter Six focused on the speech of a single participant to illustrate the ways that contradiction was at work in her responses. While each of the participants' speech included contradictions related to justice, drawing attention to a sole participant's speech allowed me to highlight the inability to summarize any participant's thinking about justice into a neat, complete definition. In exploring the contradictions in this participant's speech, I suggest moments where her language seems to be drawing upon multiple discourses around how teachers should think about difference in the classroom (colorblind vs. systemic) and what should be prioritized in classroom spaces (curriculum vs. justice vs. citizenship).

In Chapter Seven, I explored the ways that the participants described the type of justice-oriented teacher they aspired to be, pointing to their tendencies to depict justice-oriented teachers as vocal about their justice-oriented practices and knowledgeable about both issues of justice happening in the world *and* how to effectively engage conversations around difficult topics in the classroom. Additionally, in Chapter Seven, I illustrated the ways that the participants distanced themselves from the idea of the ideal justice-oriented teacher both explicitly and implicitly through apologetic statements made to me, the researcher, and their former teacher educator. As a result, at the end of the chapter, I asked teacher educators to consider whether the model of the vocal, knowledgeable justice-oriented teacher is an image that is forwarded in teacher education programs. If so, it is important to consider whether this is the only possible image of the justice-oriented teacher, or if justice-oriented teacher educators should consider how else justice-work might be depicted in university classrooms.

In the remainder of the findings chapters, I drew attention to some of the broader circulating ideas the participants described as constraining their enactment of justice-oriented teaching and I gestured toward possible discourses that might be shaping those responses. In Chapter Eight, I described the constant spectre of community backlash and being fired the participants invoke when discussing their hesitancy or inability to talk about justice issues in their classrooms. Specifically, I noted the types of stories that the participants used to illustrate what the threat of community backlash looked like, stories in which teachers were disciplined or fired for actions like displaying a Black Lives Matter magnet or failing to remain *neutral*. Additionally, I outlined topics the participants saw as potentially too controversial for the classroom and how they described the

pressure to keep controversial ideas out of the classroom affected their curriculum. I contextualized these fears of community backlash in stories circulating in news media which described angry outbursts from parents and community members in response to both school policies and teachers' curricular choices that relate to issues of justice. Toward the end of this chapter I challenged teacher educators to take these threats of community backlash and of losing jobs seriously. Instead of suggesting that *teachers shut the door and teach*, it is imperative that teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to respond to the real and inflammatory contexts in which they may enter the classroom. This may require a rethinking and expanding of the types of pedagogies that are forwarded in justice-oriented teacher education programs as well as focused conversations about the political realities of teaching in the present moment.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, I focused on the ways that the participants talked about the curriculum as a force constraining their enactment of justice-oriented work in their school settings. The participants repeatedly spoke about the limitations of what was possible in their classrooms, citing the need to stay on pace with the curriculum and to teach in ways that were identical to other team teachers. While it would be impossible to state precisely what discourses the participants drew on in their conversations about the constraining forces of community backlash and the curriculum, I offered some possible parallels to discourses circulating on the national level that might perhaps illustrate how these anxieties were thinkable for the participants in this study.

Now, I return to the quote I used to open this section. For the participants in this study, justice was "*never the same ever."* Conversations around justice were filled with contradictions and allusions to other concepts, other incidences, other happenings. The

participants responded positively to particular examples of justice-oriented teaching in the vignettes and then later in our conversations described those very examples as problematic. They unquestioningly associated the idea of justice with other ideas that are nowhere to be found in the theoretical literature such as *controversy* and *the election*, suggesting that what justice has come to mean for these teachers exceeds beyond theoretical or academic definitions of justice. And, more than anything, they described the numerous ways that they, self-described justice-oriented educators, felt constrained by forces emanating from both within and outside of school settings. In what follows, I will suggest some possible ways that teacher educators might read and respond to these findings. However, before moving into that discussion, it feels important to emphasize that these complex, contradictory, and deeply contextual responses to doing justice-work in schools are *not* indicative of failures of these teachers or of the teacher education program that they completed. The process of becoming justice-oriented and doing justice-work is never linear, never clear. Rather than reading these findings as signaling the achievements of these individuals, I insist that they must be read as indicative of the broader landscape of thinking about justice: the contradiction, the complexity, the way that it is always, already bound up in generations-long strings of discourses that are intersecting, entwining, separating, and mutating in every single moment.

Implications for Teacher Education

It was an unusual position for me to be both the researcher in this study and the participants' former teacher educator. Only months before, my co-instructor and I had organized a virtual graduation ceremony for them[54]. My face was sore from smiling when

[54] The official university graduation had been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

the video call ended. I felt joyful for their accomplishments and also hopeful, confident that *they* would be the ones to go into classrooms and undo oppressive structures. *They* were capable of doing justice-oriented work in the classroom. I was proud of them and I was proud of myself. As I spoke with the participants over the course of their first year of teaching and as I watched them grapple with what it meant to be a justice-oriented teacher in the complicated spaces they entered, I worried that perhaps I had failed them, perhaps I had not prepared them for their teaching positions. However, it was considering my second research question, *what discourses do they call upon in responding?* that allowed me to think differently about their grapplings as indicative of something else about teaching and learning.

It is possible to interpret these findings in many ways. In the interest of resisting *denouement,* I will offer two different ways that teacher educators might think of observations made over the course of this dissertation.

The Best We Can Hope for Is Complexity

Numerous times throughout this project I reiterated the idea that teaching and learning are not neat, linear processes. Teacher education is not an intervention that can function to completely change the trajectory of an educator's development. Thus, rather than thinking of education in traditional ways that emphasize linear learning, I suggest that perhaps the best we can expect from teacher education is to open up spaces of complexity for preservice teachers in pursuit of justice. Doing this would be to take seriously the task set forward by Kumashiro (2001):

> Change (of the student and of society) cannot happen in predictable, controllable lessons: Students are never exactly who we think they are, they never come from

> exactly where we think they do, and they never respond exactly as expected. Anti-oppressive education is not an easy, rational, straightforward process, and pretending otherwise can actually contribute to additional forms of oppression (Ellsworth, 1992). Therefore, an anti-oppressive education that expects crisis for both students and teachers may need to create a space in the curricula where students can enter and work through crisis in ways unforeseeable by the teacher. (p. 8)

Here, Kumashiro (2001) emphasized that treating justice-oriented (or anti-oppressive) education as a rational, straightforward, or linear process could serve to perpetuate oppression. Instead, Kumashiro proposed an education that *expects* crisis. The participants in this study certainly experienced crisis over the course of the 2020-2021 school year. At numerous points they expressed contradiction, uncertainty, and frustration at the limitations they felt were placed on their teaching practice. As described in Chapter Seven, the participants expressed a particular crisis around the image of what a justice-oriented teacher was and how a number of conditions distanced them from enacting that image. Perhaps, then, a justice-oriented teacher education program that is rooted in crisis, that expects crisis, could illustrate to teachers that the process of being and becoming justice-oriented is not one that is linear, not one in which a teacher comes to fulfill particular criteria and becomes "justice oriented," but instead one which exposes teachers to the complexities of doing justice oriented work in a particular place in a particular moment, rife with negotiation and limitation. This type of teacher education may not produce the same type of satisfaction of a typical teacher education program. It may have no *denouement*, no unknotting, but instead an acknowledgment of the ways

teaching and learning are always knotted up in broader discourses and a preparation for what taking action as a teacher among those competing discourses entails.

Teacher Education Needs Contextualization

Of course, one way to think about the data presented in this dissertation is to read teacher education as ultimately ineffective in promoting justice-orientations in teachers. Under this line of thinking, one might argue that because the participants did not feel fully confident in asserting their justice-orientations in their own classrooms, they were not enacting the work they had been taught to do in their teacher education program and thus were failing in some way. Perhaps one might attribute this failure to the shortcomings of the teacher educators, of the curriculum, or of the institution of teacher education more broadly.

However, I see this reading as negating a great deal of the complexity of the data. As described in Chapter Seven, the participants repeatedly called on ideas of justice they learned in their teacher education programs and expressed frustration that they did not feel that they could enact those ideas given their positions in their particular schools and classrooms. They did not leave the learning they did in the teacher education program behind; it continued to pull at them. Instead, the issue seemed to be that there was no clear way to reconcile that learning with the other forces at work in their particular settings, especially as first-year teachers.

So perhaps one way to think about the implications of this study for justice-oriented teacher educators is that teacher education must be undertaken with an acknowledgement of how the messages of teacher education programs are situated within the broader context of the complexities preservice teachers will encounter upon

graduating and entering the classroom. This vision of teacher education may involve explicitly discussing the power of dominant, authoritative discourses at work in schools and education more broadly. Perhaps, then, teacher educators could work with preservice teachers to develop tools for questioning and thinking about those discourses in order to recognize how, once they enter the classroom, they might be able to resist or work against them. Importantly, this does not mean telling preservice teachers to *shut the door and teach*, but rather engaging them in conversations about how teaching is always a political activity happening in the context of ongoing political contexts to which the teacher must respond.

Another way of enacting this vision of teacher education could involve providing induction support to graduates of justice-oriented teacher education programs. This type of support may be one way to engage in this complexity and to assist novice teachers in making sense of how the justice-oriented practices they learned in their teacher education program could interact with their current setting. The limited research that exists in this field suggests that while many graduates regard their learning about diversity and social justice as important, they are unable to effectively implement it in practice without additional support (Fuller, 1992; Juarez et. al, 2008). There have been studies about various forms that support might take for early-career justice-oriented teachers, including mentorship around justice-oriented pedagogies (Picower, 2011) and communities of practice for justice-oriented teachers (Philpott & Dagenais, 2011). Perhaps, using the digital tools now available, teacher education programs could develop and maintain these types of structures for graduates of their justice-oriented teacher education programs. Not only could these structures benefit graduates of teacher education programs, they would

also serve as fruitful sites for continued research. In my own study, the participants stated multiple times how helpful it was for them to have a community familiar with the foundational learning that happened in their teacher education program to talk through problems of practice they encountered in their first year of teaching. One, for instance, stated:

> *I wish everyone from [the program] could be in this space with us. It gets so discouraging being the only one trying to figure out how to do social justice work in my school. It's nice to have a group of like-minded people to share with.*

Building induction support networks specifically for graduates of justice-oriented teacher education programs to receive support around enacting justice work in the face of the pressures of their school context could help new teachers navigate how to carry out the work of justice-oriented teaching after graduation. Of course, there would not be a clear-cut or prescriptive path for what these support spaces might look like, especially given the fact that the contexts of the teachers would always vary. However, this study demonstrates that the presence of an ongoing, unstructured space for graduates to grapple with issues of justice allowed them to identify some of the competing ideas and pressures with which they were surrounded.

It should be noted that despite the existence of this space, the preservice teachers in this study still felt uncomfortable or unable to enact some justice-oriented pedagogies in their classrooms. Thus, I am not suggesting that providing induction support would completely solve the problem of transfer from a justice-oriented teacher education program to a teacher's own classroom. However, I will first point out that because the focus groups I designed were spaces for research, I did not engage in explicit instruction

around justice-oriented practices that might perhaps take place in other induction support settings. Second, I want to emphasize that the point of these supports in not necessarily to "fix" the barriers that may exist for teachers to enact justice-oriented practices. Instead, these spaces could be structured to support teachers as they work through the numerous constraints that may be acting upon them and as they navigate the competing discourses circulating in their spaces. Being able to have those conversations could support teachers to still consider the work worth doing and to conceptualize different ways that work might take shape in response to their particular situations and contexts.

Future Directions

More than a resolution, I see this project as an opening-up of additional spaces for inquiry in justice-oriented teacher education. First, this study focused on the ways that teachers talked about justice in their schools and classrooms. However, much could be learned from work that pairs discussion with teachers about justice in schools with observations of those teachers' enactments in the classroom. Discourses matter because they stand to influence the ways individuals behave in the world (Davies, 2003). Thus, it would be meaningful to observe how the complex tangles of discourses and ideas that exist in a teacher's speech connect to the choices they make while teaching in the classroom and interacting with others in the school.

Further, as illustrated in Chapter Three, there is a lack of empirical research in the field of teacher education that focuses on justice as an unstable concept and attends to the differing ways it is taken up by teachers. This dissertation study illustrated that teachers' thinking about justice is always in flux and always embedded in broader discourses.

Additional work attending to the differing and complex ways that teachers think about and talk about justice would add significant and necessary complexity to the field.

Beyond these specific examples, there is a general need for work in teacher education research that challenges linearity as a model for learning and intervention as a model for justice-oriented teacher education. These studies could take the form of different modes of enacting teacher education, different curriculum, and different structures to be carried forward into the induction years. Longitudinal studies that follow graduates of justice-oriented teacher education programs into the classroom could serve to productively complicate extant research that assesses preservice teachers' justice orientations by gathering data from only one point in time.

Finally, this study demonstrated the powerful ways that stories circulating about teachers in news and social media can function to influence teachers' perceptions of what is possible in the classroom. For instance, in Chapter Eight, I noted the ways that stories about teachers being disciplined or losing their jobs for engaging in talk around justice issues served to shape the practices of the participants in this study. While these stories carried the particular scent of the 2020-2021 school year, there will certainly be stories about teachers that continue to fill news and social media sites. Thus, there will be an ongoing need for work that considers how these stories can function to perpetuate particular discourses about teaching and learning.

I opened this dissertation with a discussion of Doris Lessing's (1962) *The Golden Notebook,* a novel that plays with form, depicting the protagonist's descent into madness as she attempts to organize her life into discrete sections which she documents in separate notebooks. For her, the only way to resolve this chaos is to create something equally

chaotic: a golden notebook which refuses traditional form, which refuses compartmentalization and instead documents the complexity and nonlinearity of her life all together. I then drew focus to Carver's (1981) "What We Talk about When We Talk About Love," which depicts a group of characters puzzling at length over all of the different, conflicting things that the word *love* can mean, a puzzling which leaves the characters metaphorically paralyzed, unable to move forward. I considered Foer's (2002) *Book of Antecedents*, and the idea that categorizing, synthesizing, and removing complexity from all literature (research and otherwise) takes it further away from life. I told the story of the large gray feather stuck into the personal library of Robert Creeley, and the organizational chaos that ensued when a team of student workers attempted to catalog it neatly, as one might catalog a book. I thought back to the middle of the 19th century and considered what Walt Whitman's (1993) "Song of Myself" might offer in thinking about the presence of contradictions in language, as something to be expected, for we all contain multitudes. I meditated on my own becoming as a justice-oriented educator and on the omnipresent narratives of teachers being disciplined in their work for their curricular choices around justice-oriented topics. With Nabokov (1989), I celebrated the beauty of the wood duck over the beauty of the swan: rejecting the quest for formal perfection. Finally, I considered Waldie's (1996) depiction of *the grid* as a force which emanates from somewhere beyond to govern the way individuals interact with the world. Thinking with all of this literature demonstrated that considering the rejection of common sense forms, the tenuousness of language, the omnipresence of contradiction, and the insufficiency of narrative are not ideas that reside solely in philosophical or theoretical discussions. They are ideas that have been circulating for centuries, and yet again and

again, Freytag's plot pyramid, stable concepts of language, and linear cause-and-effect reign supreme as the taken-for-granted logics that govern research, storytelling, and sensemaking in the contemporary world. In this dissertation, I presented my study as a sort of Golden Notebook, compiling the differing ways that participants acknowledged justice and grappled with justice in their speech over the course of the academic year. It is my hope that the literature in justice-oriented teacher education will continue to populate with work like this, work that insists that justice-oriented work *must* be done. Yet work that also acknowledges that the doing of justice-oriented work will always be complicated, will always be messy. This work must insist that teacher education is not about clear, linear interventions; it is not about finding the perfect type of candidate to admit to a teacher education program. Instead, the task that teacher education must take up is to consider the multiple ways that teachers (both preservice and practicing) are always already being constituted by competing discourses and to support those teachers to respond to the numerous logics and narratives they will encounter in the field. In this way, I hope, we can establish a literature that is "becoming more like life" (Foer, 2002, p. 196), that "contains multitudes" (Whitman, 1993, p. 155), that resists denouement, that represents the complexity of the work and the struggle so that we can read teachers generously as they engage continuously in becoming justice-oriented.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
    a. What kind of teacher do you hope to be?
3. Describe the school where you currently work. What ideas about teaching and learning are promoted at the school?
    a. Possible probe: Describe the student population.
    b. Possible probe: Describe the teacher population.
    c. Possible probe: What kinds of professional learning or training has the school provided?
4. What ideas about justice and equity do you hear talked about in the school where you currently work? Do you see any teachers or administrators doing justice-oriented work?
    a. What are your concerns about justice in your school community? How do you think they could be addressed?
    b. How comfortable do you feel addressing issues of justice in your classroom?
        i. What anxieties do you feel about addressing issues of justice in the classroom?

ii. What topics, if any, do you see as too controversial for discussion in the classroom.

5. Think about your teacher education program. How are the practices in your school similar to or different from ones you learned about in your teacher education program?
6. Let's talk a bit about our current moment:
    a. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted you?
        i. Do you see others or the world any differently since the pandemic began?
        ii. Has the pandemic highlighted any social issues or tensions you did not notice before?
    b. How have the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breona Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks affected you? How did you respond to the uprisings and protests which occurred across the country?
        i. Do you see others or the world any differently since experiencing the coverage of these events?
        ii. Have these murders and protests highlighted any social issues or tensions you did not notice before?
    c. How do you see COVID and racial violence being discussed in your school, either among faculty or with students?

APPENDIX B

ELICITATION VIGNETTES

Demographic Information

For each of the following vignettes, assume the following.

- The teacher described is under 30 years old and White. They have been teaching for fewer than 5 years.
- Each teacher describes themself as a justice-oriented educator.
- The school is located in a community with significant racial, ethnic, economic, and gender diversity.
- Roughly 80% of the students receive free or reduced lunch
- The student body identifies as 50% Black, 20% Latinx, 10% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 20% White
- Several students in each class identify as LGBTQ+

1) **Teacher A**

   Over the summer, Teacher A read several news stories relating to police brutality and increased violence against black trans folks. He then realized that the books he had his students read, the historical events he focused on, and the scientists and mathematicians he highlighted as trailblazers were overwhelmingly White, cisgender, heterosexual, and male. Over the summer, Teacher A commits to re-making his classroom library so that the main characters are reflective of the racial and ethnic makeup of his students and include many LGBTQ+ individuals.

When the school year begins, Teacher A does not make a point to highlight his new books or to explain the reasoning behind the changes to his Scientist of the Week, he simply integrates these books and practices into his lessons. However, he feels proud that his students can now see characters and historical figures who may be more like them being celebrated in the classroom.

2) **Teacher B**

During COVID schooling in Spring 2020, Teacher B noticed that many of her students could not log in to Google classroom to complete their assignments. She knows that many of these students did not have consistent internet access or had other responsibilities that kept them from completing their work. Even though state tests were cancelled in Spring 2020, she is worried about these students being behind when testing returns. Teacher B is aware of the achievement gap at her school and does not want it to worsen due to the pandemic.

So, Teacher B begins holding tutorial sessions for those students who were unable to access their assignments during COVID schooling. Once the new school year begins, she asks those students to either come in during lunch or stay for an extra hour after school each day for the first nine weeks of school to begin to make up for lost learning time and to address the achievement gap.

3) **Teacher C**

Teacher C will be a Social Studies teacher at a new middle school this fall. He has previously taught in primarily White, suburban school districts. However, his new

job is in a community that is more economically and racially diverse. After watching coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement over the summer, he feels the need to better connect his content to his students' lives.

Teacher C does some research and reads that Black students tend to respond well to call-and-response methods. So, he plans to incorporate call-and-response questions into his typical lectures. Additionally, he expands the choices he offers for end-of-unit assessments to include an option that asks students to write a rap about the content. He hopes that these changes will increase student engagement in his course and make his new students feel included in his classroom.

4) **Teacher D**

Teacher D wants to address race and class disparities in a way that feels personally relevant to students. While she has felt this way for a long time, she feels particularly motivated after seeing the disparities in students' engagement with COVID schooling and the resistance she saw among many school families to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Teacher D decides to dedicate a few days of lessons during the first quarter of the school year to discussing how her students experience discriminatory practices at school. She begins by having a discussion about the ways her school made her feel inferior to male students as a young girl both through lessons and school policies. Then, she encourages students to write about ways that events in school -- in or outside of the classroom -- have made them feel inferior or judged due to

their race, social class, gender identity, sexuality, or any other characteristic. She encourages students to discuss these events and work together to disrupt inequities in their school.

5) **Teacher E**

Teacher E is concerned about the trauma her students experienced both as a result of violent police responses to protests in their city and the high number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the community. She is particularly concerned because many students who have been living in isolation may not have been able to communicate about or process their feelings in response to these events.

At the beginning of the school year, Teacher E delays the regular curriculum and instead spends several days asking students to write through their feelings and experiences. She also engages students in structured small group conversations where students are given particular times to speak and to listen. She hopes these experiences will help students who have experienced trauma heal and will also help those who were further away from the protests and the virus understand the impact these events had on other students in their community.

6) **Teacher F**

Teacher F sees issues of inequity and discrimination embedded in all parts of American society. She recognizes that this discrimination is unlikely to change and wants to prepare her students to be strong in the face of it.

So, Teacher F designs a program for character education that she plans to pilot in her team. She will teach mini-lessons on traits such as resilience and self-control. Then, she and her team teachers will reinforce these ideas throughout the year and provide each student feedback on their growth in each area in individual discussions and at parent-teacher conferences. Teacher F sees this as an opportunity to teach her students the skills they will need to be successful in the face of continued inequity and discrimination.

APPENDIX C

ELICITATION VIGNETTE RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Elicitation Interview:

1. What do you notice about this vignette?
    a. (possible probe) What is this teacher doing to promote justice in their classroom?
    b. (possible probe) What issues, if any, do you see in what this teacher is doing to promote justice in their classroom? Would you do it differently?
2. (After viewing all vignettes) Which of these vignettes most aligns with how you would enact justice-oriented teaching in the classroom? Could you sort these vignettes from those which seem most like what you would do in your classroom to the one that is least like what you would do?
    a. Could you explain the way you sorted the vignettes?
    b. Would you change the way you sorted these vignettes if the teacher were teaching in a school with a different student population?
3. Which of these cases do you think would be most likely to be pursued in the school where you teach?
4. Would you feel comfortable discussing issues of justice and pursuing these actions in your classroom?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. A few minutes to check in generally
    a. How are you doing? What is going on in your schools right now?
2. Where are you seeing issues of justice in your school or classroom right now?
    a. (possible probe) How are those issues being responded to?
    b. (possible probe) Do you feel comfortable addressing issues of justice that come up in your school? Explain why.