

Stories That Matter: An Analysis of Teacher Candidates' Compositions About Social Justice Events in Their Lives

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Abstract

This study generated from our interest in learning about social justice events in the lives of teacher candidates in our programs of study. In many schools of education, including our own, social justice is a concept that is integrated into the curriculums, yet there is wide variation as to how this is actually done. A unique aspect of this study was that more than half of the candidates were matriculated in an alternate teacher education program where the majority of candidates are people of color. Using narrative analysis, we examine 48 written narratives composed by teacher candidates about events relating to social justice in their lives. Results indicated that candidates' narratives clustered into two themes and six categories: The themes consisted of stories about self or family members and to other stories about people in their communities. The categories pertained to racism, bullying, sexuality/gender identity, homelessness/elderly and social violence, with the stories about racism as being the most frequently described. Our findings are discussed in light of the importance of understanding the life experiences of today's teacher candidates, especially when there is greater diversity in their color and ethnicities than previous generations of teachers. These social justice stories offered us the opportunity to learn about the saliency and the emotional effects of social justice events in our teacher candidates' lives, and we suggest ways our programs might be improved to better prepare future candidates for teaching in today's racially and culturally diverse schools.

Keywords

social justice, teacher education, diversity

National demonstrations after the George Floyd killing have generated vigorous discussions about the ways U.S. society must change so that all people are treated with dignity, respect and receive equitable opportunities to succeed in life. These discussions have stimulated important debates about education's role in contributing to a socially just and equitable society (e.g., Jackson, 2020; Jenson, 2021; Kinloch et al., 2020; Rowan et al., 2021). In this study we examined teacher candidates' awareness of social justice

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events in their own lives with the purpose of improving our understanding of ways we can improve our teacher education programs so that our candidates will be better prepared to teach for justice and equity in today's schools.

National demographic data reveals that teacher candidates remain largely white and of European descent while school children are increasingly diverse in their ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Hussar et al., 2020). The differences between teachers' and children's ethnic and cultural identities can have profound effects on learning as evidenced in the extent to which teachers are able to establish trusting relationships with students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), relate curricula to students' lived experiences (Moll et al., 2001), plan learning activities that build on students' ethnic and cultural identities (Muhammad, 2018, 2019 & 2020) and engage and motivate students to learn and succeed in school (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999).

Social Justice in Teacher Education

Social justice is a concept that many schools of education, including our own, have integrated into their mission statements. Yet, there is wide variation in how social justice is actually translated into practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Quan et al., 2017; Spitzman & Balconi, 2019). Some programs emphasize multiculturalism, others focus on civic education, community involvement, social action projects or combinations of all four models (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008). A similar lack of precision at implementation is seen in more recent efforts to address equity issues in education; that is, regardless of how well intentioned, programs vary widely in how they interpret and integrate equity concepts in their preparation of new teachers (Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022).

The essential components of social justice in teacher education are threefold: (a) helping teacher candidates develop a critical awareness about how their own identities and life experiences affect teaching and learning (e.g., Quan et al., 2017; Maddamsetti, 2020; Pugach et al., 2019; (b) preparing candidates with strength-based teaching strategies that build on children's social and cultural knowledge (e.g., Ayers et al., 2008; Christensen, 2017; Ehrensworth et al., 2021); and (c) applying transformative models of instruction so that children learn to critically examine and challenge normative views of the world that interfere with the attainment of social justice in their own lives and communities (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

Theories and practices for integrating social justice into teacher education are abundant. The work of Ayers and his colleagues (e.g., Ayers, 2009; Ayers et al., 2008; Ayers et al., 2004; Stovall & Ayers, 2005) have been particularly helpful at informing our understanding of social justice theory and practice in teacher education. Foremost among Ayers' contributions has been his emphasis of teaching in a democracy where all students are to be valued, and that regardless of their family incomes, ethnicities, languages or color, they are all equal and deserving of high-quality education. Furthermore, Ayers' work calls our attention to the importance of employing a strength-based perspective in teaching in which children's life experiences, language(s) and eagerness to learn are valued and incorporated into classroom lessons. Ayers argues that instead of deficit-driven perspectives about what children do not know, teachers must build on children's strengths by connecting school curricula with their life experiences. Ayers' work presents many examples of how curricula can be rethought and revised to include concepts, events and narratives relating to social justice, and his ideas have been an important resource for our own work in teacher education.

There are two methods texts that we have found especially helpful in understanding practical ways to implement social justice teaching into our teacher education programs. The first is that of Christensen (2017) who describes how writing can be effectively employed as a tool for students' self-reflection, identity formation and social change. She argues that classroom pedagogy must integrate a curriculum of empathy that makes strong connections with students' identities and lived experiences. Christensen offers many instructional strategies for how writing can be used to encourage students to express their identities, share narratives about people and events that have mattered to them and to their communities. Importantly, Christensen encourages teachers to create opportunities for students to compose narratives about social justice events in their own lives, including those that pertain to violence, misogyny, and racism. Christensen's work is especially informative because of its emphasis on using composition to help students examine issues of social justice and inequities in their lives, in the experiences of those they love and the communities they live.

A second and more recent work that is especially informative for preparing candidates for social justice teaching is that by Ehrensworth et al. (2021). The ideas and pedagogies presented in this text present strong theory with contemporary instructional practices for using literacy to develop students' sense of social justice and civic engagement. Teaching strategies pertaining to student identity, implicit bias in everyday life, digital composing and critical literacy are framed within the concepts of literacy for civic engagement and social justice. The theory and methods presented in Ehrensworth et al.'s work supports our own ideas for helping our candidates learn how to teach with a focus on social justice.

Purpose of the Study

This study generated from our interest in helping teacher candidates reflect on how their own identities and life experiences might improve their understanding of how to teach for social justice. Our research questions were the following:

- What do teachers write about when asked to compose an essay about a social justice event in their childhoods?
- What themes and patterns appear in the teachers' compositions?
- What have we learned about our teacher education candidates so we can better prepare them and future students with pedagogies for teaching about social justice and equity in schools?

Method

We used narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to examine teacher candidates' written compositions about events relating to social justice in their lives. Narrative inquiry was selected as our method because of its appropriateness for understanding our research questions relating to teacher candidates' experiences with social justice through the stories that they composed. As such, personal stories served as the data for this study, and narrative analysis was our method.

The case consisted of 48 graduate students completing coursework in a Master of Science in Teaching program; 27 of these students worked as teaching-interns in high poverty schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn and were part of an alternate teacher education program where they completed a graduate program with state certification as Generalists in Adolescent Special Education. Institutional

data³ indicated that 68% percent of the candidates in this alternate teacher education program identified themselves as persons of color, which is significantly higher than conventional teacher education programs where only 15% of candidates identify themselves as persons of color (Hussar et al., 2020). The other 21 students in this study were matriculated in traditional graduate level masters' programs leading to certification as secondary teachers in the various disciplines such as English, Social Studies and Mathematics.

Our Positionality

Our social and ethnic identities correspond with what is well-known about the national pool of teacher candidates. That is, we are white and of European descent and the first generation in our families to graduate from college. We completed our doctoral studies at the same university, and we taught together at that university as graduate fellows and later worked as colleagues in a nearby college for more than 20 years; we presently teach at different institutions—one of us teaches at a college in an upstate New York and the other at a university in New York City. Our professional backgrounds are in literacy education and our goals have included helping teacher candidates become highly effective with all children, but we have had special interest in assuring that our students become especially capable when teaching in schools where children have historically been underserved and received inequitable opportunities to learn because of poverty, lack of school funding or systematic bias inherent in society.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data generated from a required writing assignment that was included in three graduate courses in literacy education. The assignment took place during the Covid pandemic in which the courses were delivered online and supplemented with required weekly Zoom meetings. The assignment required the candidates to draft a narrative about a social justice event from their own lives or one that they had witnessed or learned about. The purpose of the assignment was to elicit thoughtful compositions and discussion about social justice events in the candidates' lives and to extend the discussion as to how similar events might occur and affect the children they taught. Christenson's (2017) work pertaining to social diversity, identity, and adolescent literacy education, in particular, informed the development of the assignment. The original assignment required candidates to include a sketch of the neighborhood where the social justice event occurred, although the sketch was not used in this analysis. Candidates were told that this assignment was required and scored as a complete or incomplete activity with their submissions counting toward their weekly participation grades. We invited students to give permission to use their essays in data analysis, but to minimize any sense of coercion that they might have felt, the forms would be submitted into a separate digital folder and only accessed after the course was completed and final grades were submitted. The assignment yielded 48 compositions that were used in this analysis. Directions as given to the students was as follows: "Compose a narrative of approximately 200 words of the memory that is most closely connected to an issue pertaining to social justice and/or equity in your own life or the neighborhood you lived."

³ Available at: <https://nycteachingfellows.org/who-we-want>

Trustworthiness of Our Analyses

This study took place in spring and fall of 2022, after the George Floyd killing and the social demonstrations that followed his death. Consequently issues of social justice and equity were not only prominent at the time in the media and teacher education literature (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022; Patel, 2021), but in our minds as well. However, issues of social justice have held a significant place in teacher education for a long time, and the programs have long been concerned about how their curricula could not only produce effective teachers, but teachers who would create learning opportunities that are more just and equitable for all children.

To help assure trustworthiness of our analyses, one of us served as an outside reader of the other's analyses of the candidates' narratives. To do this, Pete first independently analyzed each of the compositions using a constant comparative method for identifying recurring themes and patterns, and later Kay cross-checked his analyses. Afterward, we discussed our analyses with one another until we agreed 100% of the time on the themes and categories identified here.

Results

Results of our analyses are presented in two parts. In the first part we discuss two overarching themes appearing in the candidates' narratives about social justice. These themes consisted of narratives describing events occurring to the candidates and their immediate family members or to events occurring to others in their communities whom they did not personally know. In the second part we identify six categories of events that emerged from our analyses of the candidates' narratives.

Two Overarching Themes: Narratives about Self and Others

We identified two overarching themes in the candidates' compositions. The first theme pertained to those narratives pertaining to events in the candidates' personal lives, including those occurring to family members and loved ones. The second was related to those narratives describing events that occurred outside of the candidates' personal lives but took place in their communities and were learned about through others, news reports or social media.

Nineteen of the students' narratives (40%) described a social justice event that occurred in their personal lives or the lives of family members. Often the students wrote that these events left indelible marks on their lives, and the memories of these events triggered deep, emotional feelings about the people harmed by the incidents. In one such narrative, for example, an African American male candidate wrote about an automobile incident in which he was stopped and ridiculed by a city policeman. The policeman's language startled the candidate because the candidate had never experienced such overt racist language and personal threats before this incident. The candidate wrote the following⁴:

This incident changed my life and how I view authority. One night while driving through Highbridge, there were a few police cars in traffic with their lights going with one policeman standing in the middle of the street. I witnessed a car in front of me essentially drive past the police cars and continue down the road. When I was close enough to the police officer, I politely

⁴ All of the narratives appear as composed by the candidates and include the surface errors appearing in their submissions.

asked him if, like the car before me, could I go around the police cars. The officer looks at me and proceeds to tell me that I asked a stupid question and that he should pull me out of my car and arrest my black ass on the spot. I had no idea where this type of behavior came from, nor did I think I did anything to warrant this type of response. In the moment I was so frazzled I could not think (Candidate Narrative, Fall 2022)

Twenty-one of the narratives (44%) described events occurring in the candidates' neighborhoods or communities but not directly involving themselves or their family members. An example of this kind of a narrative is one shared by Brandon, who is of Asian American and Latino heritage. Brandon described an egregious event occurring in a city park near his house where he grew-up in the deep South. In this event an African American teenager was attacked and tied by his neck to a fence by two white adolescents. After learning about the event, Brandon's parents became alarmed and feared for his safety when he was out in the community. His parents anxiously thought that Brandon might also be attacked because of his skin color. Brandon's narrative reads as follows:

I chose to do the neighborhood I grew up in because it is most familiar to me in my memories, and this is the place where many situations occurred. I had many great moments in my neighborhood and over all had a great childhood. My neighborhood was diverse as there were African American, Hispanic, and Asian families ... There was an unfortunate incident between the tennis court and the swimming pool that occurred in 1999. Three kids, one African American kid and two white kids were in the parking lot between the swimming pool and tennis court after the pool had closed around sundown. The two white kids had opened the wiring of the fence of the tennis court and strapped a jump rope along the fence. They tied the jump rope around the African American kid's neck and left him there until a passerby a few hours later found him. It was a horrifying experience because not only was it cruel; it was racially motivated... The two white kids were never charged or taken into custody for the incident, and it was my first experience of how some groups can get away with crimes (Candidate Narrative, Spring 2022)

Categories of Events Appearing in the Candidates' Narratives

We discovered six categories of events in the candidates' narratives. These categories pertained to (a) racism, (b) bullying, (c) sexuality/gender identity, (d) homelessness or elder abuse, (e) social violence, and (f) outliers that represented events that we could not categorize as social justice incidents. Table 1 displays the six categories appearing in the data. In the subsequent sections we describe and present examples of each of these categories.

Racism. Eighteen of the candidates' stories (37%) pertained to racism and bigotry that they or family members experienced. Some of their stories portrayed threats of physical violence. In Miguel's narrative, for example, he wrote about an incident that occurred to his father. At the time of the incident Miguel was in the intermediate grades and living in Staten Island. The family car had previously been stolen, but several days prior to the incident Miguel's mother reported to the police that the car had been recovered. However, evidently the paperwork identifying that the car was recovered had not been processed by the police, which resulted in the event that Miguel remembered many years later. Miguel's narrative described how his father was driving the same car home from work when the city police

confronted him in front of their house. The police handcuffed and arrested his father while Miguel watched from the living room window. Miguel perceived the police behavior as racist because the father had tried to explain he was the owner of the car, but the police did not listen. Miguel was traumatized by the incident:

My mom and I were in the other room when we heard a loud knock on the door. My mom went to open the door as the authoritative knock continued. She looked through the peep hole as a police officer was standing on the other side. The officer asked to open the door. My mother refused unless he showed his badge through the peep hole. The officer obliged and she opened the door. The officer asked for her name and if she knew my father. She said of course because he was her husband. My mom walked outside and saw my father handcuffed and leaning against a police car... My father did not speak English so my mother translated for him as the officer restraining my father taunted my dad. I recall running outside and seeing police lights. My mom yelled at me to get inside while she tried to pacify the situation. I was scared because I was taught the police is supposed to protect you, yet an officer was hurting my dad...
(Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

Table 1
Categories of Topics in the Social Justice Stories

Category	N	Percentage
Racism	18	37
Bullying	8	17
Social Violence	7	15
Sexuality	4	8
Homelessness	2	4
Elderly	2	4
Outliers	7	15

Cierra wrote how her family moved from the Bronx to a middle-class suburb north of the city, when the events described in her narrative occurred. Her narrative revealed the strong emotional effects the episode had on her and her family. The contextual background was that Cierra's family had immigrated from Central America to the Bronx. Over time, the father succeeded financially and purchased a house in a middle-class neighborhood that was mostly white and located in suburban Westchester. Cierra's account is as follows:

For some reason these two white kids who were no older than 12 years old started throwing ice cubes at my siblings and me ... I remember these boys calling us 'wetbacks.' I was confused and didn't understand why they were being so mean ... We ran into the house ... She (mother) saw the two boys screaming and throwing ice... They started throwing ice cubes at my mom's brand-new van ... She didn't speak English back then, so she didn't understand what the boys were saying... After that, she had my dad build a fence surrounding our property (Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

The candidates' stories about racism were often deeply personal and conveyed strong emotional feelings. Many of the candidates wrote that they still felt traumatized about these events, even though

they often occurred decades earlier.

Some of the narratives pertained to events occurring in schools. Marcela, for example, wrote about a tenth-grade teacher who called her a “wetback” during a lesson because Marcela lost her place when it was her turn to read aloud in class.

I remember this day like it was just yesterday when I experienced my first time ever being racially profiled and discriminated. It was my 10th grade English teacher, Mr. X, it happened during our read aloud session. He called my name to continue the reading during that time I was jotting down notes and so I forgot where we last left of. Mr. X became very upset because I lost my place during our read along session and so he made the comment “Marcela, do you have a green card? Show me your green card.” My reaction was defensive since all my friends were in the same class and I felt so embarrassed by those comments my teacher had made. After this incident happened, I went down to the principal’s office and told them what happened, they were in shock and apologetic. Afterwards, I called my mother to explain what happened, she asked to speak to the principal, my mom was very upset and was threatening the school that she will sue for racial discrimination. The principal proceeded to speak to the teacher, we came to an agreement that he needed to publicly apologize in front of the whole class and to my mother as well (Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

Bullying. Eight of the candidates’ stories (17%) described events related to bullying, and this represented the second most frequently occurring category in the data. Sean, for example, described his experiences in a segregated program for students with disabilities where other students harassed him. When he complained about the harassment to his special education teachers, they tried to assuage his feelings, but they did not discipline the children who bullied Sean. His narrative reads as follows:

I was a special education student ... which means that I was with other special education students during the school year. Two special education students would come up to me and bully me every day during recess ... I went to my teachers, but they said, "I am sure they do not mean to be mean. It must be a misunderstanding." (Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

Social Violence. Social violence represented another category of narratives in the lives of these candidates. We classified six of the candidates’ narratives (15%) as pertaining to social violence. Such stories were often gripping and revealed conflicts caused by people’s skin color and/or ethnic identities. One of the narratives described violence between competing gangs of teenagers who lived in two small cities a few miles north of New York City. This particular narrative depicted tension between an adolescent male and a local gang. On the evening of the attack, the boy sat with friends in a city park, and the event unfolded as follows:

This park is down the street from my apartment building; open but could get very dark during the night. I can imagine the poor boy, not supposed to be at the park during the late hours but having seemingly innocent time with friends. Unsuspecting the violent fate that awaited him, it is said that he tried to fight back against his attacker, but eventually succumbed to his wounds at the hospital. The murderer was arrested within the next few days. After this, although the crime was not committed on school grounds, the middle and high schools installed metal detectors, something that was not thought of before. Whenever I would go past that park, I would think of the young life lost so senselessly. (Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

Another narrative pertained to teenage gangs in Brooklyn, in which the candidate, who was a young

adult at the time, witnessed a shooting. The event occurred across the street from where the candidate lived as she walked home in the evening with a friend. The event is presented in descriptive detail and framed in terms of social justice:

As we continued to walk, we got closer and closer to the block that my apartment was on. It was only a couple blocks past the Applebees on Flatbush Ave. I mention Applebees as it was in that location, right out front, that something horrific transpired. As we neared that block, we saw a group of about ten African American teenagers arguing back and forth. There was pushing and yelling, and it looked like some teens who were about to get in a fight. Next thing we knew, right in front of us a gun was pulled out by one of the teens and multiple shots were fired. People started running away from the gunshots as fast as possible. My friend and I ran across the street where Juniors Cheesecake is. Unfortunately, before we crossed, I witnessed one of the first shots go into another teenager's head. Sirens blared, police and ambulance came, and we eventually crossed back over the street. As we crossed over, I saw the teen who was shot in the head put on a stretcher with blood pouring out his head. "He's dead," I whispered to my friend. (Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

Sexuality/ Gender Identity. Four of the narratives (8%) related to sexuality/gender identity. Lori shared a narrative about her cousin who was frequently bullied when on a suburban school bus. The two cousins attended the same suburban school and rode the bus together each morning. Other boys on the bus constantly bullied Lori's cousin because of his affect, which was perceived to be feminine by many. Although Lori tried to help her cousin, the bullying never stopped.

Michael and I were the same age and went to school together through middle school and high school. I remember he would constantly be bullied based on what people assumed his sexuality was. I always tried my best to support him and stand up for him whenever I could... (Candidate narrative, Fall 2022)

Homelessness. Two of the teachers' stories (4%) related to homelessness in their communities. Sara's story was about a homeless man, whom she observed daily when walking to school. One day the man was badly beaten by an assailant. Although Sara did not witness the actual assault, learning about it increased her awareness of the issue of homelessness in her upper income community. Sara's understanding of what happened to the homeless man remained a vivid memory many years later. She shared the following comment about the incident:

I chose to highlight the incident of a homeless man being beaten nearly to death in my neighborhood ... it was incredibly jarring and shocking when it ... It was completely unprovoked, and there was little to no police follow up (Candidate narrative, Spring 2022)

In another account about homelessness, one narrative described a newly gentrified neighborhood in Manhattan where the candidate lived. A homeless man had lived under an outside stairway near the candidate's brownstone building. As winter progressed, the homeless man collected more and more cardboard to serve as protection from the wind and cold. The candidate wrote that a neighbor complained to the police about the homeless man's presence and the cardboard boxes under the stairway. One day the homeless man disappeared with his cardboard shelter removed by sanitation workers. The candidate perceived the event as an issue of social justice because she, as well as others on the block, were upper middle-income people living in expensive brownstones when just a few feet away

from their doors lived a homeless person.

Outliers. We assigned seven narratives (15%) to an “outlier” category. These consisted of narratives that did not clearly fit into any of the other categories and represented topics that we did not believe related to social justice. For example, there was one story about a friend who stole candy from a sweet shop, another story pertaining to a family incident in which the father unfairly blamed a sibling for misbehavior and one account about winning a school essay contest pertaining to drug abuse, but the candidate did not explain how the incident related to social justice.

Discussion

In this study we examined teacher candidates’ written narratives about social justice events occurring in their lives and communities. A distinguishing characteristic of the candidates who composed these narratives was that more than half of them were matriculated in an alternate teacher education program in which 2/3 of them also identified themselves as persons of color, which contrasts significantly from conventional teacher education programs where the vast majority of candidates identify themselves as white. Our study’s findings revealed that nearly half of the candidates’ social justice stories occurred to themselves or family members and their stories consisted of six categories: The most frequently occurring narratives were those that the candidates identified as racist in nature and experienced by themselves, family members or people in their communities. Other categories pertained to bullying in school, sexuality or gender identity, homelessness or elder abuse, and social violence occurring between gangs who fought for power and territory in urban settings.

Educators have long known the importance of making connections between students’ life experiences and the curricula being taught in school. Simply stated, the more connections that can be made between students’ lives and the curricula being studied, the more likely learning will occur. The social justice stories composed by these teacher candidates offered us, as teacher educators, the opportunity to learn about the saliency of these events in the candidates’ lives. In particular, we learned that nearly twice as many of the social justice stories composed by these candidates described events relating to racism than any other topic. Such results would certainly contrast with what would be found in traditional teacher education programs where candidates are largely white and less likely to have direct personal experience with racism, although other kinds of injustices might characterize their stories, such as those due to religious intolerance, linguistic differences, poverty, and disabilities, among others.

Our study’s findings suggest that teacher education programs must not only seek diverse candidates for classroom teaching, but the programs must allow opportunities for the candidates to share and discuss their life experiences with one another, even when their stories conflict with normative accounts about American life. For instance, accounts that the country remains a melting pot, a land of opportunity or a meritocracy are examples of narratives requiring scrutiny because they do not match with the narratives these candidates composed. Stories about racism and prejudice that were so prominent in our findings can serve as counter-narratives to normative accounts of American life where the current social order is frequently left unquestioned in school curricula.

Teacher education curriculum will change as their candidates become more diverse in their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Most of us are well aware that multicultural topics, such as learning about the food, music and arts of people from diverse backgrounds are valuable, but those topics do not go deeply

enough into capturing people's life experiences and ways of thinking. Similarly, theories of learning as embodied in major theorists such as Piaget, Gardner, Maslov, and many others are significant and worthy of study, but those theories are insufficient for understanding how race, ethnicity and culture affect many children's life experiences and opportunities to succeed in school and life.

The social justice stories in this study revealed the importance of these events in the candidates' lives. Such stories are pertinent to teaching in a multiracial society and should receive greater emphasis in teacher education programs than they currently do. Socio-cultural learning theory (e.g., Moll et al., 1992; Vygotsky, 2012), critical race theory (e.g., Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and recent work by Muhammad (2018, 2019, & 2020) in which personal identity is viewed as a force that frames and empowers learning, offer potential for improving our candidates' understanding and success when teaching in today's racially and ethnically diverse schools.

Social justice stories, such as those composed in this study, present opportunities for teacher educators to learn more about the life experiences and identities of their teacher candidates. By having candidates compose and share personal stories about social justice, we all will have grown in learning about the importance of justice and equity in candidates' lives. Ultimately, having opportunity to share such stories matter a great deal not only for the candidates in our programs, but also for the schools they will be employed and the children whom they will teach.

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