
Extending the Conversation

Applying the CEE Position Statement *Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education to Classroom Praxis*¹

sj Miller, Peter Williamson, Marshall George, Jennifer King,
Brian Charest, Deborah Bieler, and Laura Bolf-Beliveau

**Disclaimer: We identify this work as highly moral, political, and ethically evaluative.
(Nussbaum, 2006)*

The 19 individuals who gathered at Elmhurst College in the summer of 2009 to work on moving social justice theory into policy in English education had a singular goal— to codify a working framework for social justice in English education that could disrupt inequitable educational practices and empower all students to reach their potential thresholds. The result of the work of the Social Justice Strand of the Conference on English Education was *The Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education*. With each belief we detail K–12 assignments, provide an appendix with teacher educator activities and assignments, provide considerations for research, and offer classroom resources for teachers (see <http://www.ncte.org/cee/positions/socialjustice>).

Our work on the *Beliefs* is a direct result of prior efforts that emerged from within the CEE Commission for Social Justice. Taken directly from the *Beliefs* statement:

We ground our work in the belief that English teaching and English teacher preparation are political activities that mediate relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and meaning-making processes. Such relationships, we believe, have direct implications for how we achieve equity and access in English classrooms.

This article takes aspects of the statement and illuminates how seven English teacher educators apply and interpret the *Beliefs* statement in their university courses. These pieces reflect our best attempt to illuminate how the application of the *Beliefs* statement to different English education courses and NCATE assessments can push critical social justice practice and standards forward in our field. We recognize that enactment of the ideas in this document by additional English teacher educators, and the resulting accumulation of a larger body of social justice research across contexts and university sites, can affect decisions made at the policy level. We hope that readers will consider both our working definition of social justice and their own working definitions of social justice as they negotiate their own positionality throughout this article.

Access to *What?* Analyzing Classrooms for Socially Just Literacy Instruction

Peter Williamson

As an English educator working at an urban university with an explicit social justice mission, I aim to help our teacher candidates expand their conceptions of literacy and literacy instruction to include the rich linguistic and cultural competencies our city's children bring to school. Too often our current national obsession with standards drives students' literacies underground because the focus on academic reading and writing leaves little space in the school curriculum for other literacies. As a consequence, courses focusing on literacy instruction are often enacted as remediation for struggling students deemed academically at risk (Marshall, 2010). I want teachers to see that such labels are problematic from the perspective of teaching with and for social justice because organizing instruction around remedial goals assumes that students have deficiencies that must be diagnosed and remediated (Flores, Cousin, & Diaz, 1991). In the case of literacy instruction, remediation begins with the presumption that students are not yet literate by particular institutional standards.

I teach a graduate level Academic Literacy course for preservice secondary teachers from all disciplines. I hope to promote the idea that teachers across content areas can challenge deficit views of children by beginning with the assumption that their students are proficient language users with rich and diverse experiences, and that to develop new literacies students need opportunities to participate in language-rich, authentic settings that can help them make connections between their existing competencies and

the ones we seek to teach. At its core, socially just literacy instruction is about providing students with equal access to these opportunities (Moje, 2007).

My readings and assignments are organized around two framing questions: (1) Where in the secondary school curriculum do students have opportunities to engage each other and the content through reading, writing, and speaking? (2) When these opportunities are present, how can we characterize them? We begin by developing a working definition of literacy that challenges conventional ideas about what it means to be a literate person. Drawing on Gee's (1996) notion of D/discourses we examine how our students are literate in ways that are often not valued in school. We then turn to the *Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education* to consider what socially just literacy instruction might look like in practice, and how this inquiry is challenging given that social justice is definitionally complex (Belief 1). Like literacy, social justice "varies by person, culture, social class, gender, context, space, and time" (CEE, 2009, Belief 1, para. 1). Recognizing socially just instruction requires us to develop frameworks for understanding both the aims and the impact of teaching for individual students in complex classroom settings.

To develop a framework for what students will see about literacy instruction in schools, we build upon Moje's (2007) distinction between *socially just pedagogy* and *social justice pedagogy*. Socially just pedagogy is a call to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn, which can be distinguished from social justice pedagogy that goes further to provide "opportunities to question, challenge, and reconstruct knowledge" (Moje, 2007, p. 4). In literacy instruction, this distinction frames the difference between teaching that draws on and celebrates students' myriad linguistic and cultural backgrounds on the one hand, and teaching that goes further to empower students to become producers and critics of new literacies on the other. While these lenses are not mutually exclusive, the way they shape instructional practices can have a significant impact on what students learn and why.

Given that student opportunities to learn are at the heart of this framework, my course assignments invite candidates to examine how teachers structure opportunities for students to gain access to the curriculum through reading, writing, and discourse, and how these activities draw on and shape students' literacy skills and identities. Beginning with interviews that focus on beliefs about literacy, the candidates ask secondary students what makes someone literate and if students see themselves as literate. The interviews allow candidates to learn about students' other skills and understandings

beyond traditional school-based notions of literacy. Other assignments invite candidates to analyze classroom texts and activities, examine student work, and videotape a segment of classroom talk to ask how the discourse opens up or closes down opportunities for students to engage each other and the teacher in discussions about content. Together these data allow the candidates to look across the various instructional features of their classrooms to ask how that literacy environment provides students access and what students might be able to learn from these opportunities.

In the culminating “literacy case study,” the candidates return to the *Beliefs* statement (CEE, 2009) to consider how their analysis shapes their own thinking about teaching for social justice. For example, they describe their own literacy-related social justice teaching goals and how they have evolved (Belief 1). They reflect on their stance as literacy educators and how this aligns with the instruction they observed (Belief 5), and they consider how social justice has provided a framework for their classroom analyses (Belief 6). Coming full circle, the candidates close their case studies by writing a letter to the student they interviewed, in which they reflect on what the student taught them about literacies that are valued in school and the role that teachers can play in challenging those limitations (Belief 7).

My aim in the literacy case study assignment is to help future teachers critically examine their assumptions about the role that pedagogy plays in creating the conditions for equity in schools. By helping candidates develop lenses for seeing the features of teaching practice that provide students with access to the literacy club (Rose, 1989), I hope to recast academic literacy instruction as the purposeful structuring of high-quality opportunities for students to learn through interactions with each other and with texts.

Striving for Social Justice through the Study of Adolescent Literature

Marshall A. George

My 15 years of experience and research in English teacher education have confirmed for me that the coursework in our programs must be relevant to the realities of the middle school and high school classrooms. As I develop and teach Adolescent Literature in a Multicultural Society each year, a required course for all English education graduate students in an urban, private, doctoral granting institution where social justice is a cornerstone of our conceptual framework, I strive to create learning experiences that are relevant to my students and that challenge them to teach for social justice. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) suggest, “Just agreeing that social justice

is important is not enough. Educators must practice social justice or else the concept is meaningless” (p. 345). Therefore my students and I explore content and pedagogies that can be used in the classroom to simultaneously create awareness of social inequities and to move students and teachers to action. I have found that through professional academic readings, works of adolescent literature, and thought-provoking action-invoking pedagogy, English education students can become powerful forces in stopping oppressive attitudes and politics from interfering with students’ opportunities for success in schools.

In addition to shared academic readings, each year I select a core novel that all of the students in the course read and study together before moving on to student-selected books from thematic text sets, author studies, issues explorations, or independent reading. Over the years, the core novels have been purposefully chosen to foster conversations around multicultural and social justice education. Texts such as *Seedfolks*, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and *The Book Thief* invite critical interrogation of individual and societal treatment of a group (or groups) of marginalized people. Each has proven effective in evoking personal response to the inequities that exist in our world and they all have strong literary merit.

I also create text sets focusing on a “Big Idea” (George, 2001). The theme for the text set has usually been either “Inequity in Our Society: Past and Present” or “Living on the Margins,” referring to the disenfranchised in our world. Based on personal interest, students choose a book to read from the lists provided. (Choice is, in itself, a pedagogical means for making a more just curriculum in English classes.) Students come together to discuss their reactions to the books, to consider possibilities and challenges for teaching the books, and to create ways that the books might serve as a springboard to action by the adolescent students in their classrooms. A few years ago I moved from text sets focusing solely on injustice in our past (e.g., *Esperanza Rising*, *Chinese Cinderella*, *Counting on Grace*, *Fire from the Rock*, *Milkweed*) to including texts that highlight more contemporary instances of inequity in our society (*Wish You Were Dead*, *Boy Meets Boy*, *Tangerine*, *The Skin I’m In*, *Rainbow Boys*, etc.). As part of book-club activities, students investigate websites of organizations that are committed to challenging the injustices in our society and collaborate to determine ways that they and their students can become active in a cause. Every year, my students become excited about the works of adolescent literature they read and with the collective enthusiasm they generate about “doing something” about the injustices they read about. To provide them with real-life examples of teachers who have successfully

instigated action, they also read professional articles that suggest ways to move beyond thinking about injustices to becoming actively engaged in current issues (e.g., Wolk, 2009).

There is evidence that the content and pedagogy from this course carries over into my students' classrooms. In the fall semester following the adolescent literature course, most take Teaching and Assessing Adolescents: English, in which they develop and teach thematic curriculum plans. Without a doubt, social justice is the most common focus of these units. As part of their work samples and final portfolios, English education students must provide evidence that what they teach affects student learning. Last year, a second-year teacher shared how students who read a book that reveals the challenges facing gay teens decided to start a local chapter of Gay-Straight Alliance in their school. In his portfolio essay, the young man stated,

Last year I never imagined that I would be reading books with gay characters with my tenth graders. When I decided to include the book as an option in my unit, I never dreamed that a group of six would choose the book and that their experience would motivate them to move them to such tangible action. When we explored this idea [in the adolescent literature course] I was excited about the possibilities, but am blown away now by the actual experience. I have truly become a teacher for social justice and my students have become part of a social movement.

This is but one of many pieces of evidence I have of the power of a social justice-focused course in adolescent literature.

Critical Pedagogy in Critical Social Justice Research

sj Miller

I teach a core course for students seeking their secondary English endorsement plus their master's degree in a Master of Arts in Teaching English program. Critical Pedagogy in English Education is sequenced at the beginning of students' coursework to support their burgeoning awareness of theoretical and pedagogical models that have shaped and are shaping the field of English education and to introduce students to a broad range of theories that help to shape and inform pedagogy and classroom practice. Some goals for the course are to encourage students to think about what it means to have an unjust society, to reflect on how social, economic, racialized, gendered, and cultural inequities have been institutionalized and indoctrinated into schooling practices and how that has homogenized dominant beliefs and perpetuated complicity through inaction or inattention. I begin the course with the following meta-question: *How do I, as an English educator, help foster,*

cultivate, invite, and encourage students to develop a social justice foci (Belief 3) that can have efficacy in their own classroom practice and that deems them to be teachers committed to social justice (Belief 1)?

Coming out as activist educator on the first day of the course sets a tone that invites, encourages, and almost insists on critique as a vital component of the course. I also draw on DeStigter's (2008) research on principled habits, which updates Dewey's (1915) *Deliberative Democracy* and Cochran-Smith's (1999) call for social justice as the conceptual centerpiece for principles of practice.

To foster this conceptual centerpiece, I focus on the application of Belief 6, *A Framework for Research*, for which the major course assignment is an empirical research project on an educational issue of students' choice. Two of the research topics from last semester included using slam poetry as research methodology for student agency and challenging First Amendment speech rights on saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

In each student's framework for critical social justice research there were three dominant narratives they could apply or develop on their own as long as it was grounded and articulated as critical social justice research: (1) Reflection, (2) Change, and (3) Participation (Miller & Kirkland, 2010). Students' literature reviews were critical of prior (social justice or critical pedagogy) studies by identifying gaps in how those studies' methodologies did not set up frameworks (Belief 2) that were by demarked social justice theories. By no means does this infer that prior studies may have lacked a frame for understanding social justice outcomes, but these students were encouraged to extend beyond some of the foundational social justice studies. Their reviews drew from current methodologies that not only speak to the literature but also to its juxtaposition and their participants' counternarratives. Students' data were also contextualized and analyzed within the threefold framework of reflection, change, and participation (or from their own framework) and drew from research literature and its methods. Data were (re)represented to reveal the constituents' values and perspectives as they challenged master narratives as we thought carefully about how to represent data, so that critical social justice research could qualify as valid research that informs policy. For instance, some of my students opted to use participants' original written artifacts, video blogs, and slam performances that their students made themselves. Research(er) trustworthiness was validated through triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, collaborative modes of research, and by revealing personal positionality. To determine research external validity, students discussed

the studies' generalizability and transferability to other research contexts through rich, thick description, typicality, or multisite design.

Lastly, there were ethical considerations that factored into their studies' designs so that it could be considered valid and reliable. For example, Sebastian, a slam poet, reflected on whether his own positional narrative and struggles with Mormonism clashed with his ethics to entice students to write; and, Sandra, who knew she would be expected to uphold the values of her school community, reflected in her positionality narrative why she disagreed with the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools.

Ultimately, these student researchers were cautious so as not to recreate hierarchies of power because for critical social justice research to be counted as policy and be considered both "valid" and "valued" it "*must be carefully considered, revisited, and negotiated with its interactants, throughout its entire tenure*" (CEE, 2009, Belief 6, para. 3). This means that critical social justice research must have a transformative impact (by enacting reflection, change, and participation) on not only the contexts and outcomes of the study but also on the participants and the researcher. Social justice research is by no means a panacea, but it can bring our profession that much closer to creating more equitable educational practices and outcomes for our current and future students in all of our classrooms.

Reflections on Stance/Position and Pedagogy

Jennifer King

I am a doctoral candidate and visiting instructor in a secondary English language arts program at a private, northeastern, urban university. My university work is closely intertwined with my teaching of and research with youth in secondary classrooms. In this article, I focus on my work with high school students, as it is my hope and intention that this work models for my teacher candidates how literacies, social action, and social justice could be integrated into pedagogy and research (Christensen, 2000). While all seven beliefs discussed in the *Beliefs Statement* are integrated into my work in secondary ELA, I highlight two of them here—a stance/position (Belief 3) and a pedagogy (Belief 4).

For me, enacting a social justice stance/position has meant shifting from the *I-you* dichotomy that I have experienced in traditional approaches to pedagogy and research to a *we* approach. I now view teaching and research not as something I do to or on others, but rather as culturally constructed activities that I engage in with others. This has required me to develop an awareness and articulation of my positionality (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong,

2000) as a teacher and researcher, a conscientization (Freire, 1990) that is ongoing and evolving. Furthermore, I have come to see the value and necessity of understanding the positionalities of the students and participants with whom I work—and not just their positionalities as I perceive them, but more importantly, their positionalities as they construct and articulate them from their perspectives and experiences. Consequently, my secondary students and I have been striving to reposition ourselves as co-learners and co-researchers. In the section that follows, I provide some examples of these repositionings.

During 2008–2009, I co-taught a Social Activism course at a local public urban high school in which three student research teams engaged in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) on student-selected topics of urban violence, environmental issues, and women’s issues. Adapting Duncan-Andrade and Morrell’s (2008) cycle of critical praxis, these students worked in their research teams to identify a social problem, investigate this problem using social science research methods, develop a collective plan of action to address the problem, present their research findings and collective plan of action in multimodal forms to authentic audiences with the goal of proposing social change, and implement the collective plan of action.

Students researched their topics using print-based and online resources, developed and administered surveys, prepared for and conducted interviews, analyzed data, and collaboratively wrote research papers. They also developed social action plans and used a variety of print-based and digital literacy practices to share their findings and proposed solutions with a variety of audiences, which included creating research poster presentations, which they shared with school, family, and community members; developing a brochure about women’s issues, which they distributed on our city streets and in their school; creating public service announcements about the water quality of the river running through our city using iMovie, which they distributed through YouTube; and composing a song about urban violence by creating beats using GarageBand and writing original song lyrics (also using iMovie distributed on YouTube).

This Social Activism course embodied social justice pedagogy in a secondary setting as “students conduct[ed] research about different social justice-related issues in their communities” (CEE, 2009, A Pedagogy section, K–12 Activities/ Assignments). Furthermore, in this era of standards, testing, accountability, and increasingly scripted curricula, we explored YPAR in a school-based setting as a potentially ideological and activist approach to literacy that could serve as one counterscript to the autonomous approaches to literacy that are so prevalent in schools today (Larson, 2007). Thus, as the

year unfolded, students in the Social Activism course used both print-based and digitally based literacy practices to read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987)—and write the word and the world—while doing YPAR in a school-based setting. As asserted in the *Beliefs Statement*, social justice in English education is a process and a promise. While I do not think that my students and I have perfected this process or promise, I do believe that we have experienced moments when we have modeled for and shared with each other what it means to live out social justice.

Remaking Methods: Social Justice and the Community Inquiry Project

Brian Charles Charest

The English education program at the public, urban research university where I am entering my fifth year as a doctoral student offers four methods courses to undergraduate and graduate students, the first of which is called Introduction to Teaching English. Each semester, I work with my colleagues and mentors to design and redesign a series of projects for this course that align with the larger goals of our program. The projects that we have developed ask students to pose inquiry through active engagement with communities and schools in Chicago. We believe that these projects can help students begin to imagine schools as culturally relevant institutions that can respond to the interests and needs of local communities (Anyon, 2005; Ayers, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). For students to test some of these ideas for themselves, though, we ask them to leave our classrooms to visit and critique different types of schools, complete a community inquiry research project, read a young adult novel with a group of high school students, and complete a collaborative literacy project with these same high school students. In this way, preservice teachers can draw from these new experiences to better explore and discuss their ideas about the function of schools in specific socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts.

As Belief 3 makes clear, this kind of open and critical inquiry into the commonsense practices of teaching and schooling needs to be a central component of teacher education programs, if we hope our students will challenge unjust school policies and disrupt current economic and social arrangements. With an eye to that end, students conduct a series of five inquiry-based projects—two portfolios, a fieldwork analysis comparing a neighborhood and a selective enrollment school, a community inquiry project, and a collaborative project with high school students—each designed to help students challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning

in an urban, multicultural setting. For example, the fieldwork comparison projects require students to visit two very different Chicago public schools. The idea behind this assignment is that students will take the first step toward exploring how and why, as Lipman (2004) notes, “schooling in Chicago is arranged in a pyramid of opportunities with a few selective programs at the peak . . . and the majority spread out along the wide base of rudimentary schooling” (p. 57). The project encourages students to draw on the critical theories we have discussed in class to analyze and suggest some possible reasons for what they observe at these different sites.

Students are also asked consider the deceptively simple question, Why teach English? (Gere, Fairbanks, Howes, Roop, & Schaafsma, 1992). The purpose of the activity is to get students to reflect on their ideas and assumptions about what teaching English could or should be about once they step into their own classrooms. This activity helps students examine *how* and *why* they have come to believe what they do about teaching English as well as the consequences of those beliefs; this inquiry also helps students frame the work they do for their two portfolios. Once students have begun to articulate some of their beliefs and assumptions about teaching English, we turn to a more thorough interrogation of where those ideas come from and how they might produce inequalities for some while opening up possibilities for others. As Belief 3 states, “We believe that English education can disrupt such inequitable hierarchies of power and privilege” (CEE, 2009, Belief 3, para. 5).

For one of the central projects of the semester, students are asked to work in groups on a community inquiry project. The project attempts to make the important connections between context and curriculum that Bieler (this article) astutely notes in her description of her Communities Project. Students in my course visit and research a neighborhood in Chicago—we choose the community that surrounds the high school where we will be working later in the semester. Students contact and then visit at least one community-based organization and interview someone at the organization or in the neighborhood. The purpose of the assignment is to give students some sense of what it means to move along the spectrum of participant observer to community stakeholder capable of enacting a culturally relevant pedagogy that actively explores the political nature of schooling (e.g., Anyon, 2005 Ladson-Billings, 1994).

As Anyon (2005) points out, “Middle and high school teachers, in particular, can make a powerful contribution to movement-building by engaging students in civic activism” (p. 188). The challenge for teacher educators, then, is to help foster the type of stance that would allow new teachers to see

movement building and community engagement as something that counts toward being a teacher. While clearly just one small step toward learning about a new community, the project is also designed to challenge the stereotypes that my students—often middle-class who have grown up outside the city of Chicago—may have about the Chicago Public Schools, its students, and its surrounding communities.

I include these five projects in the hope that my students, echoing Miller's reference above, might begin to develop what DeStigter (2008) calls "principled habits" that are "a way of thinking and acting that leads them to explore what a principle like 'justice' or any other might mean amid all the variables of a given context" (p. 126). The thinking and acting described above need not be predicated on some preformed notion of what social justice has to be or how it should be enacted in schools; rather, these principled habits might help preservice teachers and teacher educators create the conditions—assignments, readings, actions, and projects—where teachers can collaborate with students and other stakeholders to shape public life in particular contexts to create more equitable conditions for all.

Developing a Social Justice Stance through an NCATE Assessment

Deborah Bieler

I still remember when I first saw the 42 standards. I had just become a teacher educator in an undergraduate English education program, and before me were the NCATE/NCTE standards that, my senior colleague explained, we were now required to assess. After recovering from feeling faint and hearing my colleagues' stunned responses, I remember saying more boldly than I felt that now we could demonstrate what I often tell new teachers: Don't let the standards become the "end" of your instruction; make them the means to your *own* ends. While Bolf-Beliveau (this article) rightly argues that we need standards explicitly addressing justice-oriented content and skills, I illustrate below how I stretched several NCTE Standards² to design an assessment that has the potential to develop teachers' social justice stance (Belief 3). I demonstrate this potential by describing the work that one student, Joslyn, completed for this assessment.

This assessment, the Communities Project, is based on the notions that classroom life is complex, influenced by social practices inside and outside classroom walls, and that educators should make efforts to allow these practices to guide and enrich subject area instruction (Delpit, 2006). Because this project asks preservice teachers to gather and reflect on data

about the community in which they will be teaching, it aims to foster the critical interrogation skills and moral agency for which the *Beliefs* statement argue. In my program, seniors take methods courses and begin fieldwork during fall semester; they then student teach full-time during spring semester. This structure is intended to acquaint them with their school communities before student teaching. This project contains five sections, each concluding with reflection: (1) an ethnographic description with photographs; (2) demographic information and state test scores; (3) partial transcripts of interviews with at least two community members, one from inside and one from outside the school; (4) analysis of the interviews; and (5) a lesson plan. Students ask interviewees about diversity in their school community; their ideas for making better connections between English classes and the local community; and their ideas about how English classes can better equip students for success. As the *Beliefs* statement indicates, understandings about what is just are context-dependent, and these questions are designed to help preservice teachers begin this inquiry. Students create a lesson plan that uses what they learned in sections 1–4, responds to the unique needs and desires of their students, and makes meaningful community connections.

Joslyn Kennard, a white middle-class senior, was placed in rural North Lake High School. In her reflection, Joslyn inquired into her school’s equitable treatment of students by considering the ethnicities represented in the school’s population:

So far, I have worked with two 11th grade classes. The higher-track English class has mostly white students. The lower-track class has mostly Hispanic and African American students. Before this project, I did not realize how much higher the “minority” percentages are in the lower-level class. I was also surprised to learn that 80% of the total student population is white; this is a lot higher than I expected. As I reflected more, a tiny unsettled feeling that I had not noticed before began to grow. Once I figured it out, it became all I could think about: This farm town is not quite as welcoming as I thought, at least not welcoming of *all* people.

During her interviews with her classroom mentor and a local parent, she also discovered that the school hosts an annual Cultural Celebration—on a Saturday—that it is attended almost solely by members of the cultures celebrated. Joslyn reflected,

The “Cultural Celebration” reminded me of Enid Lee (Miner, 2004), who would say that North Lake is only in the “surface stage,” where the school “welcomes” diverse students with signs in their language and food from their cultures.

Joslyn's unprompted application of Lee's heuristic and her identification of her unsettled feeling as a response to inequity provide evidence of an emergent social justice stance.

What makes Joslyn's project an even more powerful example of a new teacher's developing social justice stance, however, is its inclusion of dialectic inquiry (Bieler & Burns Thomas, 2009). When Joslyn examined her class's curriculum, she wondered: "I see all of this monocultural education, but what am *I* going to do about it?" Joslyn then crafted and administered a survey to her students, a move away from making assumptions that illustrates another aspect of a social justice stance (Belief 3). Joslyn's survey results indicated 60 percent of her students felt that their culture was not embraced in English class, and so during her lesson, students debated what literature is and its role in school, then reviewed the survey results and determined whether various local texts were literature.

Joslyn's journey demonstrates the promise of building assessments that help preservice teachers develop an awareness of and a personal response to local inequities. These dispositions are essential for teacher educators to develop intentionally in preservice teachers because, as Joslyn's journey attests, "If pre-service teachers were made aware of . . . inequitable schooling practices . . . , perhaps they would be more likely to address [them] in the classroom" (CEE, 2009).

Social Justice and NCATE: A Call for Additional Standards

Laura Bolf-Beliveau

As Bieler (this article) shows in the previous section, the NCATE accreditation process can infuse social justice into English education. This section, however, suggests that we make a promise for and commitment to social justice through additional NCTE/NCATE standards. In its current state, none of the 42 standards specifically addresses social justice. If we are to make a promise "to embody and enact social justice in schooling" as indicated by Belief 7, our accreditation materials must change so faculty, students, and supporting constituents (i.e., university supervisors) are able to evaluate preservice teachers' ability to make pedagogical and curricular choices that support social justice.

I make this argument based on my own English education program's data regarding Standard 2.2, which appears in the category of ELA Candidate Attitudes and states: "Candidates will use ELA extensively and creatively to help their students become more familiar with their own and others' cultures." Although there is no mention of social justice in this standard, I use

it within my undergraduate methods course as an opportunity to think about social justice. Course readings (including parts of the *Beliefs* statement) and discussions focus on addressing issues of inequality, and preservice teachers are asked how understanding their own culture will better help them work with students of differing cultures. Their integrated unit plan, a common assessment for NCATE accreditation, is assessed, in part, by their ability to address issues of cultural diversity.

My preservice teachers are asked to read Standard 2.2 as a social justice standard, paying close attention to disrupting power and privilege as it appears in their own curricular choices. This aligns with Belief 7: “Our promise presupposes that no student should be privileged over another and that our pedagogy, curricular choices . . . honor ALL students, ALL of the time” (Conference on English Education, 2009. Belief 7, para. 2).

Assignment sheets and rubrics clearly state this interpretation of Standard 2.2, yet when final unit plans are submitted, students do not consistently integrate social justice. Four cycles of data show that only 21.5 percent of preservice teachers meet the target goal of socially just curricular choices. One student demonstrated this ability by preparing a unit for Sherman Alexie’s *Flight* where strong connections were made to historical, political, and sociological events that affected the protagonist’s worldview.

Although 40.5 percent of my preservice teachers met with Acceptable levels of Standard 2.2, 38 percent were at the Unacceptable level. One student at this level discussed religious implications in Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass* but only acknowledged a Christian point of view.

Given all of the front-loading activities in class, I was dismayed that such a large number of students did not include cultural diversity and social justice into their integrated unit plan. The overall mean, 1.84, indicated that students were not translating our discussions of cultural diversity and social justice into their curricular planning.

These same students, during the same semester, were assessed for Standard 2.2 during a field experience. This assessment was part of an experience in which teacher candidates worked with a practicing teacher for 30 hours and then implemented a single lesson. Mentor teachers were asked to complete a short assessment of the candidates based on Standards 2.1–2.6. Much different results occurred. According to their mentor teachers, these same students used ELA extensively and creatively to address cultural diversity 97 percent of the time. The overall mean was 2.59.

The contrasting data show that standards can be and probably are read with different intent. I used Standard 2.2 as a way to share my promise to social justice. Practicing teachers, generously giving their time to preservice

teachers, read this standard differently. And although this is only a single snapshot of one English educator's attempts at infusing social justice in her program, it nonetheless suggests that in the current form, our accrediting standards do not help *all* constituents understand social justice as it appears in the *Beliefs* statement.

It is therefore imperative that additional NCTE/NCATE standards be created to address social justice explicitly, and I offer these suggestions:

- › 2.0 ELA Candidate Attitudes:
Candidates use social justice as a framework for encouraging their students to consider the ways in which inequities shape their own and others' lives.
- › 3.0 ELA Candidate Knowledge:
Candidates incorporate their knowledge of social justice into curricular, instructional, and assessment decision-making.
- › 4.0 ELA Candidate Pedagogy
Candidates will understand the purposes and attributes of social justice as it pertains to teaching practices in ELA.

If we believe, as the *Beliefs* statement asserts, that English education can and should disrupt “inequitable hierarchies of power and privilege” (CEE, 2009, Belief 3, para. 5), and if we are committed to disrupting current practices that sometimes reproduce social inequities, then specific standards addressing social justice should appear in our accrediting materials.

Social Justice on the Horizon

We hope that what we have offered here can broaden the lenses for how English educators can translate social justice theory into practice in English education programs. While we recognize that our research and teaching overlap our commitment to social justice policy, practice, and outcomes, and the co-authors of this work wrote in isolation from one another, thematic trends connect our pieces. We therefore share these themes and invite others to follow-up on future considerations for working with social justice in English education. Common to all of the authors' pieces and underscoring the ideology behind the *Beliefs* statement was the need for (1) consensus statements (from CEE, NCTE) about the politicization of social justice in English education; (2) threading social justice theory, practice, and assessment throughout all of English education; and (3) continuing in research efforts that can ascertain, challenge, and change classrooms across the

country that prevent students from experiencing fair and equitable schooling experiences. We invite others to join us in these challenges, to identify in their own English education contexts the spaces that would benefit from the application of the *Beliefs* statement, and to work collectively toward expanding socially just schooling experiences across the horizon.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise stated, all names are pseudonyms.
2. Please see <http://www.ncte.org/cee/ncate/program> for more information.

References

- Alexie, S. (2007a). *Absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Alexie, S. (2007b). *Flight*. New York: Black Cat.
- Anyon, J. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Ayers, W. (2001). *To teach: The journey of a teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bieler, D., & Burns Thomas, A. (2009). Finding freedom in dialectic inquiry: New teachers' responses to silencing. *Teachers College Record*, *111*, 1050–1064.
- Bloor, E. (1997). *Tangerine*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research*. New York: Routledge.
- Christensen, L. (2000). *Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (1999). Learning to teach for social justice. In G. A. Griffin (Ed.), *The education of teachers* (pp. 114–144). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Commission for Social Justice. (2009). *Commission for social justice mission statement*. Retrieved from <http://commissionforsocialjustice.wetpaint.com/>
- Conference on English Education Commission on Social Justice. (2009). *CEE position statement: Beliefs about social justice in English education*. First Biennial CEE Conference. Chicago: CEE. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/cee/positions/socialjustice>
- Curtis, C. P. (1995). *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- DeStigter, T. (2008). Lifting the veil of ignorance: Thoughts on the future of social justice teaching. In s. Miller, L. Beliveau, T. DeStigter, D. Kirkland, & P. Rice (Eds.), *Narratives of social justice teaching: How English teachers negotiate theory and practice between preservice and inservice spaces* (pp. 121–144). New York: Peter Lang.

- Dewey, J. (1915, May 5). *The New Republic*, 3, 40.
- Draper, S. (2007). *Fire from the rock*. New York: Penguin.
- Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S., & Wong, L. (2000). For whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 107–151). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Flake, S. (2000). *The skin I'm in*. New York: Hyperion Books.
- Fleischman, P. (1997). *Seedfolks*. New York: HarperTeen.
- Flores, B., Cousin, P. T., & Diaz, E. (1991). Transforming deficit myths about learning, language, and culture. *Language Arts*, 68, 369–379.
- Freire, P. (1990). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.
- Gee, J. P. (1996). Discourses and literacies. In *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (2nd ed., pp. 122–148). Philadelphia: Routledge Falmer.
- Gere, A., Fairbanks, C., Howes, A., Roop, L., & Schaafsma, D. (1992) *Language and reflection: An integrated approach to teaching English*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- George, M.A. (2001). What's the big idea? Integrating adolescent literature in the middle school. *English Journal*, 90(3), 74–81.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Larson, J. (Ed.). (2007). *Literacy as snake oil: Beyond the quick fix* (2nd ed.). New York: Peter Lang.
- Levithan, D. (2005). *Boy meets boy*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers.
- Lipman, P. (2004). *High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. New York: Routledge.
- Mah, A. Y. (1999). *Chinese Cinderella*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Marshall, S. (2010). Re-becoming ESL: Multilingual university students and a deficit identity. *Language and Education*, 24(1), 41–56.
- Miller, s., & Kirkland, D. (2010). *Change matters: Critical essays on moving social justice theory to policy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Miner, B. (2004). Taking multicultural, anti-racist education seriously: An interview with educator Enid Lee. In K. D. Salas, R. Tenorio, S. Walters, & D. Weiss (Eds.), *The new teacher book: Finding purpose, balance, and hope during your first years in the classroom* (pp. 140–149). Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools.
- Moje, E. B. (2007). Developing socially just subject-matter instruction: A review of the literature on disciplinary literacy teaching. *Review of Research in Education*, 31, 1–44.
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2005). *NCTE/NCATE program standards*. Author.
- Nussbaum, M. (2006). *Frontiers of justice*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

- Pullman, P. (1997). *The golden compass*. New York: Del Rey.
- Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary*. New York: Penguin.
- Ryan, P. M. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.
- Sanchez, A. (2001). *Rainbow boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2009). Developing social justice literacy: An open letter to our faculty colleagues. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90, 345–355.
- Spinelli, J. (2003). *Milkweed*. New York: HarperTrophy.
- Strasser, T. (2008). *Wish you were dead*. New York: Egmont.
- Winthrop, E. (2007). *Counting on Grace*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books/Random House.
- Wolk, S. (2009). Reading for a better world: Teaching for social responsibility with young adult literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52, 664–675.
- Zusak, M. (2005). *The book thief*. New York: Knopf Books.

Sj Miller is an associate professor and director of the Master of Arts in Teaching English program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Sj is the 2007 recipient of the Richard A. Meade award, founded and now co-chairs the CEE Commission for Social Justice, and has most recently published, with David Kirkland, *Change Matters: Critical Essays on Moving Social Justice Research from Theory to Policy*. **Peter Williamson** is an assistant professor of teacher education at the University of San Francisco. His research looks at the teaching and learning of clinical practice, teacher development, and urban education. **Marshall A. George** is chair of the Division of Curriculum and Teaching and associate professor of English & Literacy Education in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University in New York City. He is the current chair of CEE. **Jennifer M. King** is a doctoral candidate in Teaching, Curriculum, and Change at the University of Rochester's Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. She is a National Board Certified Teacher in Adolescent Young Adulthood/English Language Arts, and her teaching and research interests include secondary English education, adolescent literacies, critical literacies, new literacies, youth participatory action research, and teacher preparation. **Brian Charest** is a doctoral student in English education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research interests include exploring how community organizing strategies might help teachers engage more effectively in public life. **Deborah Bieler** is an assistant professor and coordinator of the English education program at the University of Delaware. **Laura Bolf-Beliveau** is an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Central

Oklahoma. She co-chairs CEE's Commission on Social Justice and is very active in her local affiliate, the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English. Her research interests include teacher identity, especially as that identity is disrupted by difference.