
SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION: JUST ANOTHER BUZZ WORD OR A TRUE DAILY STRUGGLE?

Todd S. Cherner, Nanci Howard, and John Delpont, Guest Co-Editors
Coastal Carolina University

This special issue aims to connect social justice theories with educational practices. In educational communities, both in higher education and PreK-12 school districts, the term *social justice* along with others – such as *standards-based education*, *content-area literacy*, and *differentiated instruction* among many others – have become almost ubiquitous catch phrases. In fact, as quoted in our call, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan famously used the phrase when he said (2009), “Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice” (para. 10). The question is, however, has the meaning behind social justice been reduced to that of a rallying cry or is there a true, fortified value behind it? Previous to Duncan’s comment, Connie North addressed this concern in her 2008 article titled ‘*What is All This Talk About ‘Social Justice?’ Mapping the Terrain of Education’s Latest Catchphrase*. In this work, she posited that the meaning of social justice is not “incontrovertible nor static” (p. 1183). Rather social justice represents a living, ever-evolving conceptualization that encompasses a range of educational fields including pluralistic education, differentiated education, critical pedagogy, democratic education, education for “college-and-career” readiness, 21st century education and several others. Now, six years later and with public education in the United States having gone through and continuing to go through substantial changes, this issue continues to grow in importance and timeliness.

Student demographics in the US public schools system highlight the fact that the number of students from historically marginalized communities is increasing rapidly and there is a growing complexity within and across these communities (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Yates, 2008). Moreover, the intersections of immigration status, race, class, sexual orientation, and culture of the students in schools creates a demographic imperative (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Yates, 2008), which acknowledges both the changes in who students are and how best to serve them. For example, minority students represent a disproportionate population of students being disciplined in schools, being labeled as “special education,” and filling juvenile detention centers (Piquero, 2008). From a demographic imperative perspective, asking questions such as: (1) How do these same students’ socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and/or religious affiliation impact how they are treated? (2) Does the interplay of sociocultural markers marginalize minority students? and, (3) Are institutionalized practices in place that oppress minority students? By addressing and exploring these questions, the inequalities that exist in contemporary US education begin to be recognized. However, recognition of oppression is limiting.

A core principle of Critical Race Theory is activism (Brayboy, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and we see it directly connecting to this issue of *The Catalyst* that focuses on social justice in education. It is not enough to recognize that racism, inequalities, or injustices exist in a society. Rather, individuals must take actions to stop it, and this call is true in education as well. Racism, inequalities, and injustices exist in our classroom, our course materials, our students, and in ourselves (if we dare to look). It is up to us, the educators, to begin responding to the demographic imperative by teaching for equality and social justice, bringing democracy into our schools and classrooms, and being teacher activists (Lund,

2003; Reed & Black, 2006), and it is these tenets of our personal teaching philosophies that we sought to honor by serving *The Catalyst*.

This issue of *The Catalyst* examines how the respective contributors understand “social justice” in education as well as how it is part of their research, teaching practices, and reflections. In the collection of works for this edition, we open with Jennifer’s DeSaxe’s article that analyzes how policies that follow a neoliberal agenda are found in educational reform movements and how to craft a socially just vision of education that is free of neoliberal ideologies. Althea Lyman’s piece follows, and it provides a case study of a “Men in STEM” book club that identifies four traits for science teachers to use culturally responsive pedagogy with students. We then offer Kristal Curry’s case study of pre-service teachers and how they understand White Privilege and race. To elaborate on White Privilege in education, Todd Cherner’s article discusses his experiences coming to understand and make sense of his own White Privilege through his teaching. Next, John Delpont and Chris Daikos explain in their article the need for community-based teacher preparation and how it can (re)shape special education. At this point in the edition, we turn to two articles authored by emerging scholars. Grace Blum, Megan Wilson, and Yelena Patish authored the first emerging scholar article that explains why and how “disability” needs to be included in teacher education courses. Jacob Hackett, Tony Coppage, Ayinde Summers, and Mecca Handy authored the second emerging scholar article that reviews the current state of teacher preparation before offering a community partnership example of education. Although each of the works included in this issue offer a unique perspective of social justice in education, the commonality they share is that activism and working for equitable change is at the center of each work. We are excited about this edition, and we hope our readers will find comfort, optimism, and a promise for a better tomorrow represented in these works.

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