

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: APPROACHES TO SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHER EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF FOUR DOCTORAL STUDENT TEACHER EDUCATORS' SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCEPTIONS AND TEACHING PRACTICES

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how four doctoral student teacher educators (DSTEs) approached social justice teacher education (SJTE). I used a multiple case study methodology to examine DSTEs' conceptions of social justice, how they developed those conceptions, and whether their conceptions were enacted in their teaching. Drawing on the social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998) and a typology of multicultural and social justice education (Gorski, 2009), I used surveys, interviews, observations, and artifact analysis to investigate how DSTEs engaged with SJTE. The following research questions guided my dissertation: How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education? What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice? How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?

Many teacher education programs have adopted social justice as a core mission. This focus on social justice, or social justice teacher education (SJTE) involves preparing teachers to

recognize and address systemic injustices both within schools and in broader society. While SJTE is widely promoted, its implementation varies, with many programs focusing on ‘ticking the boxes’ of coursework content rather than how teacher educators enact SJTE (Zeichner, 2009). The ambiguity of "social justice" and challenges in fostering social justice dispositions further complicate this work (Gorski, 2009).

Findings indicate that the four DSTE participants in this study possessed critical conceptions of social justice (Gorski, 2009). Their conceptions differed based on how explicitly they discussed resistance and advocacy. These conceptions were shaped by personal experiences with injustices, critical theories, social participation in communities of practice, and institutional tensions. The conceptions that the DSTEs held were enacted in varied and personalized ways, often rooted in their own prior personal and teaching experiences. However, the DSTEs tended to teach their conceptions of social justice from a more theoretical stance, with less emphasis on translating those ideas into concrete classroom practices for preservice teachers. Institutional structures at the university, such as rigid program curricula, inconsistent faculty support, and a lack of formalized SJTE guidance, frequently constrained DSTEs’ ability to fully enact their conceptions in practice.

Based on the finding that DSTEs navigate tensions between their social justice commitments and the institutional contexts in which they work, this study highlights the need for teacher education programs to provide more explicit, ongoing, and practice-oriented support for DSTEs. By examining how DSTEs conceptualize and apply social justice, this research offers actionable insights into how programs can prepare future teacher educators to advance social justice in teacher education.

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OF FOUR DOCTORAL STUDENT TEACHER EDUCATORS' SOCIAL JUSTICE
CONCEPTIONS AND TEACHING PRACTICES**

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In recent decades, many teacher education programs¹ in the United States have adopted social justice as a core mission. This social justice emphasis, or social justice teacher education (SJTE) involves preparing teachers to recognize and address systemic injustices both within schools and in broader society. In his description of the state of teacher education, Zeichner (2006) asserted that "...it is difficult to find a teacher education program in the United States that does not claim to have a program that prepares teachers for social justice" (p. 328). Nearly two decades later, Zeichner's (2006) claims about teacher education programs remain relevant. For example, in my own teacher education program, one of the core institutional values is that the faculty, staff, students, and alumni are committed to social justice (Program Diversity and Inclusion webpage, 2023). This commitment to social justice by teacher education programs is encouraging because there is evidence that SJTE is beneficial for K-12 students' educational outcomes (Adeyeye, 2024; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Seider et al., 2020). While research demonstrates the promise of SJTE, its impact on teacher practices in K-12 schools is far from guaranteed as its effectiveness hinges on how teacher education programs are designed and how teacher educators implement those designs (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). One problem with SJTE implementation is that many programs that claim to prepare teachers for social justice often struggle to achieve their social justice goals because their approach to teaching teachers to

¹ When I use the term "teacher education program" I am referring not only to program requirements for graduation (coursework, field experiences, standards, assessments, and licensing) that make up a teacher education program. I am also referring to those administrators and faculty members who shape and run the program. These faculty are often teacher educators and are influential on what constitutes the program.

recognize and address systemic injustices is inconsistent, superficial, or fragmented (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009).

A reason for teacher education programs' struggle to implement SJTE is that they often fail to critically examine or support how teacher educators prepare future teachers for social justice (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). Currently, there is limited research about how teacher educators, including doctoral student teacher educators² (DSTEs), conceptualize social justice or how they translate those conceptions into practice (Goodwin & Darity, 2019). The lack of practical and scholarly understanding around teacher educators' role in SJTE represents a critical gap in efforts to align programmatic goals with the realities of teacher preparation.

In this dissertation, my goal is to begin to close this gap in our practical and scholarly understanding of SJTE by examining the social justice approaches of four doctoral student teacher educators (DSTEs) who are responsible for preparing teachers. I examined the DSTEs' social justice approaches through their conceptions of social justice, the developmental processes they went through to form those conceptions of social justice, and how their conceptions of social justice enacted in their teaching practice. To analyze these approaches, I used Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning and communities of practice (CoP), to explore how DSTEs develop and enact their conceptions of social justice within the contexts of their programs. I also applied Gorski's (2009) framework for concepts of multicultural and social justice education to guide me in categorizing DSTEs conceptions of social justice.

This dissertation contributes to the broader research base by advancing understanding of how social justice is learned, how DSTEs conceptions influence their social justice-oriented practices, and how teacher educators can be more effectively supported in cultivating social justice

² Doctoral student teacher educators (DSTEs) are doctoral students studying to receive their doctoral degree in education who are tasked with teaching preservice teachers as part of their programmatic funding.

pedagogies. In offering practical implications for teacher education programs, this dissertation informs both immediate program improvement and the long-term trajectory of educational social justice scholarship. In the following two sections, I explain the reasons I chose to research DSTEs instead of faculty teacher educators³, and outline the research gap around DSTEs.

A Focus on Doctoral Student Teacher Educators

In this dissertation, I focus on DSTEs for three reasons. The first is that within the U.S., the typical pathway to becoming a university-based teacher educator begins with P–12 classroom teaching experience, often followed by doctoral study. During this time, doctoral students frequently assume instructional roles as part of their program requirements and funding packages (Berry, 2007; Zeichner, 2006). Understanding the DSTE experience is essential to not only improve current SJTE experience, but to strengthen the pipeline of social justice teacher educators for the future. Second, doctoral students often find that their experience as a DSTE is the first time they have taught preservice teachers. Dinkelman et al. (2006b) describes this DSTE phase as “a powerful force in shaping the professional practice of teacher educators over their careers” (p. 135). Understanding this developmental period is important because DSTEs’ early teaching experiences shape long-term pedagogical commitments and professional identities. Third, DSTEs are a significant portion of the teacher education labor force. How teacher educators conceptualize social justice and the practices they model are critical in shaping how future teachers engage with justice in P–12 settings (Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020). Therefore, understanding DSTEs’ development and improving support for the implementation of SJTE should have a direct benefit on current preservice teachers’ understanding of social justice and how to translate that understanding into more socially just P-12 teaching. The ultimate goal of

³ Faculty teacher educators are faculty members within the teacher education program who teach courses that include a wide range of teacher preparation foci.

SJTE is to prepare teachers who can recognize, challenge, and address the injustices that persist in K–12 education and broader society.

Doctoral Student Teacher Educators and Social Justice - A Research Gap

Despite the centrality of teacher educators in SJTE, scholarship in this area remains limited. In a literature review, Rowan et al. (2021) found that studies of teacher educators rarely address the “ways that teacher educators select, access, reflect critically on, and evaluate various standpoints about diversity and select epistemic aims” (p. 149). Similarly, Mills and Ballantyne (2016) argue that “the predominant focus [of research] has been on changing [teachers], rather than teacher educators,” which places undue “blame” on teachers for systemic shortcomings while neglecting the philosophies and pedagogies of those who prepare them (p. 25). Other scholars have also pointed to the scarcity of research on what teacher educators do in their classrooms to foster social justice teaching (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; Kavanagh, 2017; Goodwin & Darity, 2019). For programs seeking to meaningfully implement SJTE and support teacher educators through the challenges of SJTE, this research gap presents an obstacle to programmatic progress. Without a deeper understanding of how teacher educators develop their conceptions of social justice and translate them into practice, it is difficult to offer effective support, define shared goals, or build program coherence.

In this dissertation, my goal is to begin the process of closing this research gap. As mentioned in the previous section, of this dissertation, I narrowed my investigation to a subsection of teacher educators: DSTEs. By narrowing my focus, I hope to increase the depth of understanding around how teacher educators develop during their time as doctoral students. In the following section, I provide a brief historical overview of the role social justice has played in

the educational system of the United States to underscore the urgent need for teacher education programs to support DSTE's to implement their social justice missions.

A Brief History of Social Justice and U.S. Education

A simple yet helpful way to understand the history of social justice in U.S. education is through the metaphor of a tug-of-war. At the center of the rope is a flag, symbolizing the nation's educational focus - curriculum, funding, standards and policy priorities. On both sides of the rope stand educational actors, such as teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, and researchers. One side is pulling the focus towards social justice goals, such as equity, diversity, and inclusion. The other side is pulling towards the economic goals of preparing students as workers to ensure global economic competitiveness. The tug-of-war metaphor does not fully capture all the different directions that the focus of education is being pulled (i.e. religious, anti-science, nationalistic). However, the metaphor provides a useful representation of the ongoing tension surrounding what education should prioritize and how it should be structured.

In the early 1900s, as school enrollment surged, educational leaders looked towards the business world for models of efficiency to meet new educational demands. Policymakers and administrators introduced bureaucratic systems to streamline school operations. These early reforms aligned education with economic goals, an influence that has remained dominant in shaping educational policy and structure ever since. Despite the strong focus on economic goals, there has always been tension on the rope as other educational actors have worked to pull back against this dominant view.

The progressive education movement of the 1900s to 1930s "pulled back" against the economic view of education. Progressive scholars like Dewey (1916) and Counts (1932) argued for schools to be places where students learn to address societal injustices. Despite these efforts,

the progressive vision of education struggled for dominance. The rise of behaviorism in the mid-20th century - which emphasized control, conditioning, and measurable outcomes – deeply shaped testing and accountability systems. These emphases aligned with the economic goals of education that began in the early 1900s. Despite the popularity of behaviorism, progressive ideals persisted in certain educational spaces.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement and the development of multicultural education (Banks, 1979), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) again shifted attention towards the goals of social justice. Educators sought to confront systemic inequality through new forms of curriculum and instruction. However, this momentum was again interrupted in the 1980s. The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, argued that the United States' education system was falling behind other nations and posing a threat to its economic and global power. In response, the rope was once again pulled towards the neoliberal ideas of education such as education standards, high stakes testing, accountability, teacher evaluations and performance-based teacher pay. These approaches to education were further emphasized by the federal government through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. While neoliberal ideals were becoming deeply embedded in the practices and goals of education (emphasizing standardization, accountability, and high-stakes testing) many education scholars began to emphasize equity and social justice, particularly as such testing illuminated stark achievement gaps based on race and income. In response, teacher education programs increasingly adopted social justice as a core goal, a shift largely driven by the *demographic imperative*— a set of three interlocking challenges for teacher education:

- 1) the increasing diversity of the students enrolled in U.S. public education; 2) the gap between such students and their teachers in terms of their lived experiences; and 3) the

disparity in educational outcomes between students of color, low-income students, and their White middle-class peers (McDonald, 2007, p. 2049)

Teacher education programs sought to address these challenges by preparing teachers to view social justice as a central tenet of teaching – also known as social justice teacher education (SJTE). The important distinction between the social justice education efforts of the early 20th century and the later 20th century is a shift in the goals of social justice from “good intentions to transformative action” (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 592). The goal of SJTE is no longer merely to recognize diversity, but to radically transform the structures of educational systems that uphold racial, economic, and cultural hierarchies.

These historical tensions have resurfaced in alarming ways in recent years. The ‘rope’ is once again being forcefully pulled away from those striving to center social justice in education and policy. President Donald Trump and his administration have aggressively targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The 2020 ban on diversity training using “divisive concepts” (Executive Order 13950) is one example of how the administration is systematically trying to erase the concept of social justice, not only dismantling related policies and research but also restricting the very language used to discuss those issues. Terms like ‘community equity’, ‘female’, ‘social justice’, ‘multicultural’, ‘Black’, ‘equity’, and ‘biases’ are among the hundreds of words being limited or erased from federal discourse, signaling a broad effort to suppress conversations about systemic inequity. This anti-DEI rhetoric has gained further traction in the administration’s second term, with universities pressured to remove anything related to DEI.

This historical trajectory illustrates the persistent struggle over whether education should serve as a tool for economic competitiveness or as a vehicle for equity and transformation. Understanding this tension is critical for situating DSTEs’ work, as their preparation and

teaching occur within these contested ideologies. Social justice education is in a precarious moment where teacher education programs need to strengthen their grip on the rope and pull back. In this dissertation, my goal is to help teacher education programs to better understand how they might strengthen that ‘grip’ through the development of their DSTEs. In the following section, I outline the goals of social justice in education to provide clarity on what teacher programs should be striving for in their design and implementation.

Goals of Social Justice in Education

As described earlier, the history of social justice in U.S. education reflects a persistent tug-of-war between educational actors who seek to center education on the goals of social justice and those who prioritize economic aims. In this section, I provide an overview of social justice goals that are being adopted in education. I briefly describe these goals at different levels, starting at the broad overarching goal of social justice and moving through teacher education programs, teacher educators, teachers, and students. These goals are informed by existing scholarship, professional discourse, and practical reasoning.

Table 1. Social justice goals across education

Level	Goals
Broad Educational Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transform systems that reproduce inequity - Promote liberation and humanization in education - Cultivate critical consciousness - Prepare students for democratic participation
Teacher Education Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare teachers to challenge structural inequities - Support development of justice-oriented dispositions and pedagogies - Provide equitable learning opportunities for diverse student populations - Center social justice in the mission - Build and sustain a diverse faculty - Structure programs as justice-oriented communities of practice
Teacher Educators and Doctoral Student Teacher Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Model critical reflection and vulnerability - Disrupt dominant discourses within teacher education - Deepen understanding of power, identity, and positionality - Bridge theory and practice for preservice teachers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate justice-focused learning environments - Mentor preservice teachers in both pedagogical and emotional dimensions
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create inclusive, anti-oppressive classrooms - Teach for equity rather than equality - Affirm student identities through curriculum and pedagogy - Advocate for justice inside and outside school settings
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel safe, affirmed, and valued - Develop critical consciousness - Participate in school and community transformation - Succeed without erasing or minimizing their identities - Practice empathy, agency, and advocacy - Connect learning to lived experiences

While these goals offer a powerful vision for what SJTE can be, existing research consistently reveals a persistent gap between program goals and program practices. The following section explores the structural, institutional, and conceptual challenges that impede the practical realization of SJTE.

The Challenges of Enacting Social Justice Teacher Education

The challenge with translating these social justice goals into everyday practice of teacher education programs is the complexity of teaching teachers. In the following section, I highlight the pedagogical and institutional challenges of preparing teachers. These challenges support my assertion that teacher education programs need to better understand how their DSTE are learning to implement SJTE to provide the necessary support to ensure SJTE is being implemented as designed.

Pedagogical Challenges for Social Justice Teacher Education

Teaching teachers is inherently complex. Loughran (2006), in his book on the pedagogy of teacher education, argued that teaching future educators requires attention to “not only what they are teaching, but also the manner in which that teaching is conducted” (p. 11). Teacher educators must go beyond delivering course content and instead they must model pedagogies

that embody the principles they teach. This complexity is amplified by the reality that many preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with deeply held but oversimplified beliefs about teaching shaped by their experiences as students in P-12 classroom (Lortie, 1975). Teacher educators need to challenge these “simplistic views of, and approaches to [teaching]...” (Loughran, 2006, p. 14) if teachers are going to be able to enact social justice teaching. One simplistic approach to education is the “banking” model (Freire, 1970), where teachers deposit knowledge into students’ heads and the students are passive in their learning. Freire cautioned that this model denies learners the opportunity to develop critical consciousness and become “transformers of that world” (Freire, 1970, p. 73), ultimately reinforcing injustice. The pedagogical complexity of teaching teachers is further complicated by the goals of SJTE.

McDonald (2007) claimed that SJTE aims to prepare teachers “with the knowledge, dispositions, and practices necessary to provide students from diverse backgrounds with high quality opportunities to learn” (McDonald, 2007, p. 2050). This process involves three interrelated components: 1) developing teachers’ understanding of social justice (knowledge), 2) fundamentally changing how they view education (dispositions), and 3) modeling teaching practices that can offer diverse students a high-quality opportunity to learn. For example, teachers learning about oppression develop their understanding of it (knowledge) and assume a personal goal of dismantling oppression (dispositions). Those teachers would then work to recognize oppression that K-12 students experience, adopt classroom practices that do not perpetuate that oppression, and develop an understanding for how to take individual and collective action to address oppression and attend to societal structures that perpetuate injustice (practices) (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). This process is not straightforward for teacher

educators due to the pedagogical challenges, but also because they often face institutional barriers and resistance rather than support.

Barriers to Social Justice Teacher Education

Teacher educators often face multiple barriers to enacting SJTE: ambiguity, teacher resistance, and institutional ambivalence. First, teacher educators must wrestle with the persistent ambiguity surrounding what "social justice" means in educational contexts. Many programs invoke the language of social justice without offering clear definitions or providing teacher educators with concrete pedagogical practices. These dynamics leave teacher educators to construct their own understandings, which vary widely and can lead to uneven and fragmented instruction (Thomas et al., 2019). The consequences of this lack of clarity are significant. Gorski (2009), in his review of 45 teacher education syllabi, noted that many omitted core elements of social justice altogether, and some even reinforced deficit ideologies that framed minoritized students as "others." McDonald and Zeichner (2009) warned over a decade ago:

The ambiguity in terms of the concept and practice of social justice teacher education will allow a wide range of programs, some with very different agendas, to lay claim to such a vision of teacher preparation... We do urge teacher educators... to develop a range of conceptions and practices that would provide some guidance (p. 606–607).

This warning about the consequences of ambiguity remains relevant today as many teacher education programs continue to have a disjointed approach to SJTE (Wronowski et al., 2022).

Teacher educators need to develop their conceptions and practices around social justice.

However, teacher educators face resistance during this development.

The challenges for teacher educators due to the ambiguity of what social justice should mean is compounded by teacher resistance and institutional ambivalence. Teachers can be resistant to learning about elements of social justice. For example, Juárez and Hayes (2010) experienced resistance from students when talking about race: "This is not about the strategies

students need. This is about students upset because we are talking about race. They think I'm spending too much time on race" (p. 244). These moments of resistance are not isolated; they reflect broader systemic issues within teacher education. Souto-Manning and Martell (2019) found that teacher education is a system dominated by White supremacy and oppression, and the resulting inequity is not accidental but a "design feature" (p. 36). Teacher educators face a unique situation where many programs that claim a goal of social justice act in a way that inhibits those that are acting towards achieving that goal. This contradiction, or "institutional ambivalence" is challenging for teacher educators to overcome.

In response to these challenges, programs must move beyond surface-level commitments to social justice and instead provide clear definitions of the term and concrete pedagogical practices for addressing it. Programs must also work to support the development of teacher educators, including DSTEs, who seek to prepare teachers to address social injustice. These pedagogical and institutional challenges make the role of DSTEs especially significant. As newcomers to teacher education, they must navigate these tensions while forming their own professional identities and social justice practices, making them an important focus for examination.

Despite the need for teacher programs to support teacher educator development, as mentioned previously, there is a research gap around understanding the developmental process that DSTEs go through to adopt social justice conceptions and enact them in practice. In the next section, I outline my research questions that I examine in this dissertation.

Research Questions

Given the current lack of scholarly understanding of how DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice and the practices they use to implement SJTE, the following research questions guided my study:

1. How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?
2. What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?
3. How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?

Summary of the Study

I used a multiple case study design to examine how four doctoral student teacher educators (DSTEs) teach teachers to take a social justice approach in their own practice. Each DSTE represents an individual case, allowing for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of their unique experiences, while also enabling cross-case analysis to identify patterns and differences across cases. I examined DSTEs' conceptions of social justice, how they developed those conceptions, and how, if at all, their conceptions of social justice enacted in shaped their teaching.

In this chapter, I have outlined the gap between the widespread commitment to social justice in teacher education and the inconsistent implementation of social justice teaching practices in P-12 classrooms. I described how the preparation of teacher educators has been largely overlooked, often leaving them to independently construct their approaches to SJTE. Furthermore, I have outlined why I have focused on DSTEs and the research gap that this study aims to address. I have also briefly outlined the history and goals of social justice in education to

contextualize this dissertation. Finally, I described the challenges that teacher educators face when implementing SJTE to reinforce my assertion that teacher education programs need to support DSTE development.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework guiding this study, which provides a lens for understanding the layered, socially situated process of becoming a teacher educator. It also reviews the literature on social justice in teacher education, highlighting research gaps related to each of my three research questions. Chapter 3 outlines the methods and data sources used in this research, including surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and instructional artifacts. Chapter 4 presents the findings from each of the four cases, while Chapter 5 offers a summary of findings and discussion of the three research questions. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present the implications for research and practice.

At a time when social justice efforts face increasing scrutiny and resistance, this study not only fills a critical gap in the literature, but it also provides timely, actionable insights for strengthening teacher education programs committed to justice. My aim is that this dissertation is another hand on the rope pulling education towards social justice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework that guided my analysis of the data. I draw on Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural education and Wenger's (1998) communities of practice and social theory of learning, situating both in relation to my three research questions.

Research Question 1: Conceptions of Social Justice

To answer research question 1: *How do four DSTE describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?* I used Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural education as an analytic framework to help me identify and categorize the ideological approaches each DSTE took toward social justice. This typology, based on an analysis of 45 teacher education syllabi, outlines five approaches that teacher educators take to multicultural and social justice teacher education for preservice teachers: (1) Teaching the Other (2) Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity (3) Teaching with Multicultural Competence (4) Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (5) Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice (see Figure 1.1).

In this study, I adopted the term 'conceptions of social justice' (McDonald, 2007) to refer to the evolving meanings that DSTEs have constructed about social justice through their experiences and participation in communities of practice. In the following sections, I describe how Gorski (2009) developed his typology and then describe each approach and provide examples for how I used this typology as a lens to examine DSTEs' conceptions of social justice.

The Development of Gorski's Typology

The syllabi in Gorski's study were collected from both public and private universities across the U.S. to provide a broad representation of coursework. Although labelled as a typology

of multicultural teacher education, Gorski (2009) used his typology to examine both multicultural and social justice teacher educators as he saw considerable overlap between critical multicultural education and social justice education. He recognized the connection between multicultural education and social justice, including social justice syllabi in his analysis. Furthermore, scholars have noted the connection between multicultural teacher education and social justice teacher education. For example, Banks (2002) identifies four approaches to multicultural education: contributions, additive, transformative, and social action. The transformative and social action approaches move beyond celebrating diversity and focus on change and action. These approaches to multicultural education align with social justice education. Sleeter (2015) has highlighted the shared goal between social justice education and critical multicultural education: addressing the injustices that students face in education. Furthermore, Gorski (2009) states that the defining principles of multicultural education include many aspects of social justice:

- (1) multicultural education is a political movement and process that attempts to secure social justice for historically and presently underserved and disenfranchised students;
- (2) multicultural education recognizes that, while some individual classroom practices are philosophically consistent with multicultural education, social justice is an institutional matter, and as such, can be secured only through comprehensive school reform;
- (3) multicultural education insists that comprehensive school reform can be achieved only through a critical analysis of systems of power and privilege;
- (4) multicultural education's underlying goal—the purpose of this critical analysis—is the elimination of educational inequities; and
- (5) multicultural education is good education for all students (Gorski, 2009, p. 4)

Gorski (2009) initially used Jenks et al. (2001) typology that differentiates multicultural education into three ideological approaches – conservative, liberal, and critical. However, Gorski (2009) found that these three aspects could be more nuanced and suggested five different approaches (see Appendix A).

Gorski's analysis focused on teacher educators' theoretical and philosophical approaches to teaching their coursework rather than the specific teaching practices that teacher educators use. He does discuss the different actions that teacher educators would take for each approach. For example, a teacher educator who takes a conservative approach would likely define education through a capitalistic lens. To answer my research question, I looked at how DSTEes made sense of these foundational ideas, such as culturally responsive pedagogy, pedagogical content knowledge, and critical race theory, through their lived experiences, coursework, mentoring, peer collaboration, and teaching. Next, I explain each approach and how I used them as a lens to define DSTEes' conceptions of social justice.

I should note that there are several limitations to using Gorski's (2009) typology as a framework for addressing my first research question. The framework privileges classification over interpretation. Categorizing DSTEes across five orientations offers a useful way to locate them along an ideological spectrum and to gain a broad, organized understanding of their conceptions of social justice. However, this classificatory approach is also reductive, it simplifies complex and evolving belief systems into fixed categories. Furthermore, Gorski's framework tends to treat conceptions as singular and bounded rather than intersectional and fluid. It does not fully account for the multiple dimensions or focal points that shape how individuals conceptualize social justice. For example, using the typology does not account for whether a DSTEes' conceptions of social justice focus on a specific form of justice, such as linguistic justice

or racial justice. As a result, the typology risks overlooking the interwoven and context-dependent nature of DSTEs' conceptions of social justice.

Despite these limitations, Gorski's typology (2009) provides a valuable starting point for analysis. It establishes a shared conceptual language that enables comparisons across participants and reveals broader ideological orientations within the field of social justice teacher education. By using the typology as an initial lens, I was able to situate participants' conceptions within a recognizable structure while also identifying where and how their perspectives exceeded or complicated the framework's boundaries.

Teaching the "Other" (Conservative)

The *Teaching the "Other"* approach, which Gorski (2009) categorizes as conservative, frames teacher education as a process of teachers learning about culturally diverse students primarily to assimilate them into dominant norms. In Gorski's syllabus analysis, 15.6% of reviewed courses reflected this approach.

These courses had three main characteristics: (1) othering language (2) homogenization of non-dominant groups and; (3) market-capitalistic lens. First, these teacher educators often employed explicit and implicit "othering language" that "implicitly or explicitly defines a person or group as being outside the realm of normalcy" (Gorski, 2009, p. 10). This language helps to maintain hegemony by attracting negative values to those that differ from the norm. Second, these teacher educators homogenized non-dominant groups. Their syllabi often "essentialized identity groups, referencing them primarily in terms of surface-level cultural traits and contributions" (Gorski, 2009, p. 11). This "contributions" approach organized course content around static and simplified depictions of identity groups, rarely acknowledging diversity within these groups or interrogating power, privilege, and systemic inequities. Third, was the market-

capitalist lens, where teacher educators presented the purpose of education as a need to “prepare students for the global marketplace” (Gorski, 2009, p. 11). Under this lens, the only reason to learn about diversity and social justice is because clients are demanding it.

This approach represents the conservative ideological spectrum in the broader debate over the purpose of SJTE (as described earlier in my tug-of-war metaphor).

Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance (Liberal)

The *Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance* approach, which Gorski (2009) categorizes as Liberal, frames diversity as something to be celebrated rather than interrogated. In Gorski’s syllabus analysis, 28.9% of reviewed courses reflected this approach. These courses had three characteristics: (1) framing multicultural education as celebrating diversity; (2) a focus on sensitivity and self-reflection; and (3) a failure to connect respecting diversity or self-reflecting to educational inequities.

First, teacher educators would frame multicultural education around celebrating diversity. The goal of these courses was to have teachers develop “respect, accept, or celebrate diversity as a central goal” (p. 12). This aligns with Banks’ (2016) “contributions approach” where teachers attempt to integrate multicultural content into their courses via an insertion of ethnic heroes and holidays (p. 155). Second, teacher educators centered their course goals on self-reflection on biases and interpersonal tolerance. Thus, the purpose of learning about diversity was not to address injustices, but to support teachers in their personal development. Third, teacher educators emphasized interpersonal relationships over systemic change, avoiding direct engagement with structural oppression. None of the courses “drew connections between respecting diversity or identifying one’s biases and larger contextual factors, such as race, gender, or class inequity” (Gorski, 2008, p. 13). These courses focused on celebrating diversity and personal reflection,

keeping the work at the level of relationships and avoiding deeper conversations about systemic inequities.

Teaching with Multicultural Competence (Liberal)

The *Teaching with Multicultural Competence* approach, also described as Liberal, frames multiculturalism as a skillset for classroom effectiveness. In Gorski's syllabus analysis, 28.9% of reviewed courses reflected this approach. These courses equip teachers with practical tools for culturally responsive instruction, emphasizing strategies over structural critique. These courses had three characteristics: (1) centrality of cultural competence, (2) focus on pragmatic and curricular skills, and; (3) lack of attention to educational inequities.

First, the teacher educators presented cultural competence as the primary course goal. This is where teachers develop their "entry level knowledge about becoming culturally responsive teachers in culturally diverse inclusive, and inner city, urban classrooms" (Gorski, 2008, p. 14). Second, the teacher educators focused on developing teachers' pragmatic and curricular skills over critical equity work. With the central course goal being that teachers can "implement effective teaching strategies in diverse classrooms" (Gorski, 2008, p. 14). Culturally responsive teaching has been treated by many teacher educators as a teaching strategy that will help teachers to learn how to teach diverse students, but it is often engaged with superficially and without attention to underlying inequities (Gay, 2002). This lack of focus on inequities is the third characteristic. These competence focused teacher educators did not focus on educational inequities explicitly. None of the courses for this approach mentioned "the amelioration of educational inequities as an aspect of multicultural competence" (Gorski, 2008, p. 14).

The key difference between this approach and the following critical approaches is that DSTE's would focus on preparing teachers to "manage" diversity rather than understand, identify, and/or transform inequitable structures.

Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (Critical)

The *Teaching in Sociopolitical Context* approach is one of Gorski's (2009) critical approaches. Teacher educators in this approach frame teacher education as a process of teachers learning how to examine how schooling is shaped by power, oppression, and historical inequality. The key distinction between this critical approach and the next is that DSTE's within this approach focus on teachers developing their ability to analyze oppression. Whereas DSTE's within the next approach - teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice – focus more on teachers developing the ability to act towards transforming oppressive systems.

In Gorski's syllabus analysis, 20% of reviewed courses reflected this approach. These courses had three characteristics: (1) critical analysis at the systemic level (2) consideration of larger sociopolitical context, and (3) engagement of critical theories. In this section, I explain these three characteristics in further detail and describe related theories and frameworks. When analyzing data, I used these characteristics, theories, and frameworks as indicators of what types of conceptions of social justice a DSTE's had. First, teacher educators focused on teachers moving beyond interpersonal awareness and examining institutional and policy-level inequities. Their goal was for teachers to be able to "differentiate between personal and institutional discrimination, as well as the forces which either promote or inhibit equity and cultural pluralism" (Gorski, 2009, p. 15). Second, teacher educators focused on connecting inequities in schools to broader societal inequities, thus situating education within political and historical forces. Third, teacher educators focused on teachers engaging with critical theories as analytical

tools for understanding and challenging inequities. For example, teacher educators taught teachers about critical pedagogy, not just as a content area, but as a process to help them develop their ability to critically analyze education.

Gorski (2009) does not name specific theories and constructs during his description of the approach. To develop a clearer understanding of what indicators of DSTE conceptions of social justice to look for when I analyzed the data, I included four related theories and constructs that I explain in further detail: humanizing pedagogy, critical consciousness, intersectional analysis, and critical race theory.

- **Humanizing Pedagogies (Dignity):** is an educational approach that centers on affirming students' dignity and lived experiences. This nurturing environment aims to counteract the dehumanizing effects that can be present in rigid educational systems that often prioritize standardization over individual well-being (Freire, 1970). By prioritizing student voices and lived experiences, it directly challenges educational policies and practices that often treat students as standardized products to be processed rather than as unique individuals to be nurtured. hooks (1994) argued that "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13).
- **Critical Consciousness (Awareness):** Gorski's (2009) *Teaching in Sociopolitical Context* approach emphasizes teacher educators teaching teachers the awareness aspect of critical consciousness. Freire (1970) developed the term critical consciousness to describe a process of learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and acting against oppressive elements of reality. For Freire, literacy was not only about decoding words but also about "reading the world". He argued that students need to develop this awareness to

recognize societal injustices and to act against oppression (Freire, 1970). Expanding on this, hooks (1994) described critical consciousness as students "confronting the reality of domination and coming to see their place in systems of oppression" (p. 30).

- **Intersectional Analysis:** is an analytical framework that examines how various systems of power and oppression, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, intersect and interact to create inequality. Crenshaw (1991) coined the term, describing it as a "lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects" (p. 1244). Like critical consciousness, intersectional analysis is concerned with helping teachers understand systems of oppression. However, intersectional analysis differs slightly with a focus on teachers understanding that these systems are not separate but are interwoven in a complex web that must be understood in its totality.
- **Critical Race Theory (Awareness):** is an education perspective, that racism is a "normal part of American life, so deeply ingrained in the fabric of our social order that it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture" (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995, p. 55). Educators that adopt a critical race lens should analyze their curriculum, assessments, and school structures to understand how they reflect and reinforce dominant racial narratives.

Teaching in the sociopolitical context approach represents a critical stance in teacher education, positioning teaching as a process of examining how schooling is shaped by broader systems of power, oppression, and historical inequality. For DSTEs, this approach involves guiding preservice teachers to move beyond interpersonal awareness and toward an understanding of the institutional and policy-level forces that reproduce inequity. While not always focused on directly transforming these structures, this approach equips teachers with the critical analysis skills and sociopolitical awareness needed to recognize, navigate, and challenge

such forces in their practice. By fostering this awareness, DSTEs lay the essential groundwork for preservice teachers to progress toward more transformative, counter-hegemonic enactments of social justice in education.

Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice (Critical)

The *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice* approach, the most transformative in Gorski's (2009) typology, frames teacher education as a project of disrupting oppressive systems and enacting radical change. In Gorski's analysis, 6.7% of reviewed courses reflected this approach. These courses had three characteristics: (1) commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony, (2) application of critical consciousness, and (3) social reconstruction as an explicit goal. In this section, I explain these three characteristics in further detail and describe related theories and frameworks. When analyzing data, I used these characteristics, theories, and frameworks as indicators of what types of conceptions of social justice a DSTEs had.

First, teacher educators position their teachers as change agents who are committed to resistance and counter-hegemonic practices. These teacher educators want their teachers to resist systemic oppression not just within their classrooms and schools, but into broader society. Thus, issues of power and powerlessness "are central to the course as they illuminate how social arrangements are imagined, constructed, and challenged" (Gorski, 2008, p. 17). Second, teacher educators move from developing their teachers' critical consciousness to applying it in practice through the process of praxis. Third, teacher educators frame teaching and SJTE not just as an exercise in individual awareness, but a project for social transformation. Courses state that "social reconstruction [was] a key project of multicultural education" (Gorski, 2008, p. 17).

Gorski (2009) does not explicitly state which theorists or theoretical concepts teacher educators emphasized in these courses, however, his description of the characteristics leads to

the concepts of transformative pedagogies, praxis, and critical race theory. While not an exhaustive list, these concepts emphasize the key characteristic of this approach - disrupting oppressive systems and enacting radical change. I describe these concepts in further detail:

- **Transformative Pedagogies:** Freire (1970) argued that traditional "banking" models of education, where students are passive vessels to be filled with knowledge, are inherently dehumanizing. Instead, a humanizing pedagogy promotes a "problem-posing" model that encourages students to see themselves not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active agents of their own learning and social change. This transformative goal is often achieved through a dialogical approach where both teacher and student learn from each other, collectively examining and questioning the world around them.
- **Critical Consciousness (Praxis):** Critical consciousness, as articulated by Freire (1970), culminates in praxis - the ongoing, cyclical process of reflection and action aimed at transforming the world. Praxis moves beyond awareness by grounding intentional action in critical understanding. Freire (1970) emphasized that reflection and action are interdependent, warning that "if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers" (p. 87). When action is sacrificed for reflection, it results in verbalism - empty discourse without tangible impact; when reflection is sacrificed for action, it produces activism without direction, which can lead to ineffective efforts or burnout.
- **Critical Race Theory (Resistance):** in education emphasizes that awareness alone is insufficient, educators must actively disrupt and dismantle the systems that perpetuate racial inequities. Actions might include creating curricula that disrupt Eurocentric narratives, advocating for equitable funding and resources, and confronting disciplinary policies that disproportionately impact students of color.

The *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice* approach represents the furthest critical point on the ideological spectrum (tug-of-war metaphor), embodying a commitment to transforming, not managing, the structures of education. While aspects of each liberal and critical approach are important for achieving social justice, this is the approach that DSTE and teacher educators should strive to enact in their class to address educational injustices as it is the only approach that aims to change the structures that are causing injustices.

Applying Gorski's Typology as an Analytical Lens for DSTE's Conceptions

To analyze how DSTE conceptualize social justice, I applied Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural education as an analytical lens. While Gorski used this typology to classify courses based on syllabi, I adapted it to examine interview and survey data from participants. Rather than evaluating the courses they teach, I focused on their vocalized conceptions, looking for alignment with the characteristics of each approach. This involved identifying indicators of each approach, such as the values, and priorities that signaled how DSTE understand and enact social justice. In Table 2., I summarize Gorski's (2009) five approaches and the frameworks and goals associated with each of them. I also show the indicators, derived from Gorski's (2009) typology, used in my analysis of DSTE interviews and survey data to determine their conceptions of social justice.

Table 2. Conceptions of social justice based upon Gorski's Typology (2009)

Approach	Frameworks / Theories	Goals	Indicators
Teaching the "Other" (Conservative)	Group-specific studies; cross-cultural communication; "contributions" approach	Prepare teachers to work with diverse student populations by learning surface-level traits, customs, and contributions of nondominant groups—often with the aim of assimilation into dominant norms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Othering language (e.g., describing groups as "different" or "outside the norm"). • Homogenizing nondominant groups (generalizations without internal diversity). • Surface-level cultural references (holidays, food, clothing). • Assimilation framing (students

			<p>adapting to dominant norms).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market-based rationale for diversity (global competitiveness).
Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance (Liberal)	Human relations; intergroup relations; tolerance education; cultural sensitivity; celebrating diversity; pluralism	Prepare teachers to enter classrooms with interpersonal awareness and tolerance for diversity, often through self-reflection on biases, without explicit engagement with systemic inequities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration of diversity without critique (respect, appreciation, celebration as endpoints). • Emphasis on bias self-reflection as main growth area. • Relationship-centered framing (interpersonal harmony as solution). • Avoidance of systemic inequities in language. • Metaphors of harmony (“getting along,” “building bridges”).
Teaching with Multicultural Competence (Liberal)	Multicultural competence; culturally relevant pedagogy; culturally responsive teaching; differentiated instruction for diverse learners	Equip teachers with strategies and practical skills to implement inclusive curricular and pedagogical practices that engage diverse students—framed as classroom effectiveness rather than structural transformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill/strategy orientation (focus on teaching tools). • Culturally responsive teaching framed as technique, not political stance. • Effectiveness framing (engagement, classroom management, achievement). • Limited or no link between competence and systemic change. • Use of competence-oriented language (toolkits, best practices).
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (Critical)	Critical consciousness; intersectional analysis; critical theories; critical pedagogy	Engage teachers in systemic analysis of how power, oppression, and inequity shape schooling; connect classroom practice to broader sociopolitical and historical contexts, developing awareness to inform teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic framing of inequities (institutional, not just individual). • Linking school inequities to societal/historical issues. • Use of critical theories (CRT, feminism, queer theory) as analysis tools. • Power/oppression vocabulary (privilege, systemic barriers). • Emphasis on developing critical consciousness (awareness before action).
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice (Critical)	Praxis; transformative pedagogies; humanizing pedagogy; counter-hegemonic pedagogy; educational activism	Prepare teachers as change agents committed to resisting dominant ideologies and oppressive practices; apply critical consciousness through praxis; use humanizing and counter-hegemonic pedagogies to enact social reconstruction and transformation in education and beyond.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching framed as political or activist work. • Praxis language (reflection-action cycles aimed at transformation). • Humanizing pedagogy (dignity, relational care, mutual transformation). • Counter-hegemonic stance (disrupting dominant narratives). • Education framed as a tool for social reconstruction beyond classrooms.

Research Question 2: Experiences Influencing Social Justice Conceptions

To answer research question 2: *What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice?* I draw on Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning

as a lens to answer this question. In the following section, I describe what defines a CoP, how learning occurs in a CoP, and how I will use this theory as a lens to answer my second research question.

Communities of Practice

A community of practice (CoP) is defined by three interrelated elements: a shared domain of interest, mutual engagement among members, and a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The domain establishes the community's focus and provides a sense of shared identity; as Wenger (1998) explains, "a domain creates common ground and a sense of common identity. A domain inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions" (p. 47). Mutual engagement sustains relationships through ongoing interaction, where members "interact regularly, establish norms and relationships of mutuality, and develop the shared understanding that enables them to do things together" (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). The joint enterprise reflects members' collective purpose and is "the result of a collective process of negotiation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 77) in which participants continually redefine what they are about and hold each other accountable to shared goals. Together, these three elements act as "a dynamic whole in which each component both contributes to and depends on the others" (Wenger, 1998, p. 74), forming the foundation for the community's learning and practice.

In this dissertation, DSTE's function as a CoP through their shared domain of preparing teachers, sustained mutual engagement in collaborative activities, and a joint enterprise of supporting preservice teacher development. In the next section, I discuss how learning occurs within a CoP.

Learning in Communities of Practice

Being alive as human beings means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical safety to seeking the most lofty

pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn. (Wenger, 1998, p. 45)

Wenger (1998) describes the process of learning through participation within a CoP.

Participation, defined as “a sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 45)

involves developing practices that both reflect and shape members’ understanding of that enterprise. In this dissertation, these practices represent not only the actions aimed at achieving goals such as social justice but also the meanings and theoretical commitments that guide those actions.

It is important to note that during participation within a CoP, there is an ongoing negotiation on meaning and practice that occurs between the individual member and the CoP. Each CoP operates within a “locally negotiated regime of competence” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74), defining what counts as valued practice. This “regime of competence” is defined by the “old timers” of the community. For example, a teacher education program might have certain teaching practices that have been defined and refined by the more experienced teacher educators. For an individual entering a CoP, known as a newcomer, that regime of competence influences their meaning and practice. It is the old idea of “this is how things are done around here”. However, newcomers can also bring their new ideas and practices to the community and begin to shape the regime of competence.

In this dissertation, the DSTEs are the newcomers entering the CoP within the teacher education program. I examined how their meanings and practices were shaped by the regime of competence that they became a part of. However, I am interested not only in their conceptions of social justice as DSTEs, but how those conceptions of social justice were developed over time.

In the next section, I discuss the different CoPs that influenced DSTEs' conceptions of social justice over their lifetime.

Communities of Practice Over Time

DSTEs are not situated within a single CoP; instead, they are engaged in multiple overlapping CoPs throughout their professional and academic journeys, moving into and out of various communities over time. The process of engaging in each one of these CoPs could have influenced their conceptions of social justice. Therefore, to understand this process, I analyzed the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice using learning processes across their life trajectories, from early educational and professional experiences to their current roles as DSTEs.

Rather than focusing solely on their doctoral program, this approach enables an analysis of how conceptions evolve through participation in multiple overlapping CoPs, including families, K–12 schooling, teacher preparation programs, and prior teaching roles, up to their current work as DSTEs. Across these contexts, conceptions and meaning were “produced, reproduced, and transformed” (Wenger, 1998, p. 56) through ongoing participation, negotiation of meaning, and engagement in the practices of each CoP. This life-course perspective highlights how DSTEs' current enactments of social justice are shaped by a cumulative trajectory of participation and meaning-making that spans personal, educational, and professional domains. In the next section, I discuss how I used this theory on communities of practice to examine how DSTEs' conceptions of social justice changed over time.

CoPs as a Lens

For DSTEs, learning in a CoP involves an ongoing process of shaping meaning. In this dissertation, I focus on how they shape their meanings related to social justice - which I refer to

as their conceptions of social justice. To answer research question 2: What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice? I examine the experiences that led to changes in these conceptions over time.

Wenger (1998) explained that meanings can evolve in several ways: "We produce meanings that extend, redirect, dismiss, reinterpret, modify, or confirm histories of these meanings" (p. 163) I used these categories as an analytical lens to identify moments in each DSTE's professional and personal history when their conceptions of social justice shifted. This allowed me to trace the influences that shaped their development.

Below are the six ways that meanings can change, adapted from Wenger (1998), as applied in my analysis:

- **Extended** – to broaden or elaborate on an existing meaning by adding depth, nuance, or new elements.
- **Redirected** – to change the direction or focus of meaning, often toward a different purpose, lens, or interpretation.
- **Dismissed** – to reject previously held meaning as no longer valid or useful
- **Reinterpreted** – to reframe or reunderstand prior meaning through a new lens or perspective.
- **Modified** – to adjust, refine, or tweak existing meaning as valid or accurate.
- **Confirmed** – to affirm and reinforce an existing meaning as valid or accurate.

Research Question 3: Social Justice Conceptions Enacted in Practice

To answer my third research question: *How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?* I draw on Wenger's (1998) conception of practice and CoPs. I begin by describing the analytical lens I used to examine DSTEs' practices through

Wenger's concepts of participation and reification. I then explain the challenges of concept-practice coherence within a CoP and how I examined DSTEs' challenges to coherence.

Using Participation and Reification to Examine Practices

To analyze how conceptions of social justice enacted in DSTEs' practice, I used Wenger's (1998) concepts of participation and reification as analytical lenses.

Participation - as individuals participate in a "...sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger, 1998, p. 45), they develop accompanying practices that both reflect and shape their understanding of the enterprise. These practices represent not just actions aimed at achieving the goal of social justice but also the meaning and theory that DSTEs use when deciding to adopt those practices (Wenger, 1998). To determine how DSTE practices aligned with their conceptions of social justice, I drew on Gorski's typology (2009) to create expected practices for each approach (see Table 3 below). As I examined DSTEs' practices, I determined where their practice fell within this table. This is not an exhaustive list of associated practices, but rather a guideline to categorize the DSTE practices that I was observing (discussed further in methods section).

Reification - I also adopted Wenger's (1998) concept of reification to examine DSTEs' practices. As individuals participate in experiences and gain meaning from them, they can solidify those meanings through reification. Reification is the "process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). For CoPs, this process of reification can involve "...abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts..." (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). For DSTEs, an example might be reifying the term "social justice" through a story of what it means to enact justice. In this way, reification displays meaning by giving form to DSTE's conceptions of social justice and teaching practices.

By using participation and reification together, I was able to examine both the actions and the artifacts of practice, revealing how DSTEs' conceptions of social justice were expressed, adapted, or muted within the CoP context.

Table 3. Conceptions of social justice with practices based upon Gorski's typology (2009)

Approach	Frameworks/Theories	Goals	Practices
Teaching the 'Other' (Conservative)	Group-specific studies; cross-cultural communication; "contributions" approach	Prepare teachers to work with diverse student populations by learning surface-level traits, customs, and contributions of nondominant groups—often with the aim of assimilation into dominant norms.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using explicit or implicit othering language that positions non-dominant groups as subordinate to Whiteness 2. Presenting non-dominant groups as homogeneous through surface-level traits or tokenized contributions (holidays, foods, famous figures) 3. Defining education through market-centric rationales (preparing teachers to 'manage' diversity for institutional or workforce demands)
Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance (Liberal)	Human relations; intergroup relations; tolerance education; cultural sensitivity; celebrating diversity; pluralism	Prepare teachers to enter classrooms with interpersonal awareness and tolerance for diversity, often through self-reflection on biases, without explicit engagement with systemic inequities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Framing education as respecting and celebrating diversity rather than interrogating inequities 2. Emphasizing sensitivity and self-reflection as primary goals 3. Failing to connect respect for diversity or self-reflection to structural educational inequities
Teaching with Multicultural Competence (Liberal)	Multicultural competence; culturally relevant pedagogy; culturally responsive teaching; differentiated instruction for diverse learners	Equip teachers with strategies and practical skills to implement inclusive curricular and pedagogical practices that engage diverse students—framed as classroom effectiveness rather than structural transformation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Centering multicultural competence as a skillset 2. Focusing on pragmatic, classroom-based strategies (e.g., lesson adaptation, differentiated instruction) 3. Avoiding explicit attention to systemic inequities or structural transformation
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (Critical)	Critical consciousness; intersectional analysis; critical theories; critical pedagogy	Engage teachers in systemic analysis of how power, oppression, and inequity shape schooling; connect classroom practice to broader sociopolitical and historical contexts, developing awareness to inform teaching.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critically analyzing educational policy and practice at an institutional level within a broader sociopolitical context 2. Engaging directly with critical theories (Critical Race Theory, feminism, queer theory, critical pedagogy)
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-	Praxis; transformative pedagogies; humanizing pedagogy; counter-	Prepare teachers as change agents committed to resisting dominant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employing resistance pedagogy and humanizing pedagogy grounded in social reconstruction

Hegemonic Practice (Critical)	hegemonic pedagogy; educational activism	ideologies and oppressive practices; apply critical consciousness through praxis; use humanizing and counter-hegemonic pedagogies to enact social reconstruction and transformation in education and beyond.	2. Preparing teachers (and their students) to resist and disrupt oppressive systems through praxis and collective action
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Conception-Practice Coherence

In this dissertation, I am not only interested in what practices DSTEes were using to enact SJTE, but also the coherence between DSTEes' conceptions of social justice and their teaching practices. CoPs operate within a "regime of competence" that reflects historically negotiated expectations for what counts as participation (Wenger, 1998, p. 137). These expectations, shaped by "old-timers" or established faculty, can define the boundaries of appropriate course content and pedagogy. In an ideal scenario, there would be a clear coherence between a DSTEes' conceptions of social justice and their teaching practices. When coherence exists for a critical DSTE, reification (syllabi, lesson plans, course activities) and teaching practices reflects deep engagement with justice frameworks, including humanizing pedagogies and praxis. Coherence allows DSTEes to implement their conceptions fully, supported by both the formal structure and mentorship of the CoP. When DSTEes' conceptions and practices fall outside those boundaries, they must navigate a negotiation space where their practices are partial, constrained, or resisted.

It should be noted that a lack of coherence between newcomers' practices (DSTEes) and old-timers' practices (teacher educators) "does not preclude learning, it can lead to innovation, boundary negotiation, and redefinition of the practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 82). Some DSTEes responded to programmatic pressures by innovating within constraints, developing strategic practices that keep elements of their conception alive, or by working at the boundaries of the CoP to influence its regime of competence. To examine coherence, I analyzed both what DSTEes did (*participation*) and created (*reification*) as well as the institutional conditions surrounding

their work. I looked at instances in which DSTEs' stated conceptions of social justice were constrained, reshaped, or diluted in practice. This framework positions the findings to address both the enactment of DSTEs' conceptions and the program's role in shaping whether those conceptions can be realized in practice.

Theoretical Framework Summary

In this section, I outlined the theoretical frame I used to answer each of my three research questions. For research question 1, I used Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural teacher education to provide a critical framework for locating DSTEs' conceptions of social justice along ideological continua. For research question 2, I examined the development of DSTEs' conceptions through the lens of how CoPs shape meanings (Wenger, 1998). For research question 3, I framed DSTEs' practice enactment through Wenger's (1998) concepts of participation and reification as well as a conception-practice coherence. These lenses provided a clear analytical pathway into the review of research that follows. In the following literature review, I examined the scholarship on conceptions of social justice in teacher education (RQ1), how these conceptions are developed within doctoral preparation contexts (RQ2), and how they are enacted in practice (RQ3).

Literature Review

Research on teacher educator pedagogy is a relatively recent area of scholarly inquiry. The acceptance and expansion of self-study methodologies in the early 2000s deepened our understanding of how teacher educators develop their pedagogical identities and practices. Yet, as Goodwin and Darity (2019) assert, a "glaring gap" remains in the literature regarding how teacher educators prepare teachers to engage with social justice (p. 63). While some scholarship (e.g. Dinkelman et. al, 2012) has explored the overall development of doctoral student teacher

educators (DSTEs), there is limited research that specifically examines how DSTEs develop and enact their conceptions of social justice within teacher education contexts.

This literature review addresses that gap by organizing scholarship in relation to the study's three research questions:

1. How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?
2. What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?
3. How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?

Organizing the literature by research questions revealed themes and gaps that this study aims to build upon and address. Before presenting the findings aligned with each research question, I outline the search strategy and criteria used to select literature for review.

To identify relevant peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations, I conducted searches using Google Scholar and ERIC, a comprehensive database for education and social sciences.

Search terms included:

- Social justice teacher education
- Conceptions of social justice
- Teacher educator identity
- Doctoral student teacher educators
- Novice teacher educators
- Teacher educator development
- Critical pedagogy in teacher education
- Communities of practice

I also reviewed the reference lists of key texts to identify additional sources that were frequently cited in the field. To ensure the relevance and rigor of sources, I established the following criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- Empirical or theoretical work related to teacher educator development and social justice
- Focus on teacher educators, DSTEs, and/or teacher education programs
- Published between 1980 and the present
- Written in English

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies focused solely on K–12 students or in-service teachers without reference to teacher educators
- Literature not grounded in a social justice or equity framework
- Non-English language publications

To qualify sources for inclusion, I considered both methodological rigor and theoretical relevance to my study's focus on social justice teacher education. Because the boundaries between DSTEs and teacher educators often blur, I also included literature on teacher educator development more broadly, given the significant overlap in their instructional roles and responsibilities. I also had to include studies on teacher educators and DSTEs that did not specifically connect to aspects of social justice but did have important insights into teacher educators and DSTEs development. This search resulted in 35 sources.

To begin the analysis, I reviewed each source and deductively coded using the research questions as initial categories. As the literature was coded, additional inductive themes began to emerge within each category. The themes that emerged from the literature are summarized in the table below (Table 4). The goal of this literature review was not only to situate the current study within the existing body of knowledge, but also to highlight the unique contribution this study makes in exploring the underexamined development and enactment of social justice by DSTEs. Throughout this process, I paid attention to methodological diversity, populations studied (e.g., faculty vs. doctoral students), geographic location, and publication type. I used a literature matrix

to track key findings, methodologies, and participant characteristics across all sources. This enabled cross-comparison and helped identify both areas of saturation and gaps in literature.

Table 4. Sources for the literature review

Research Question	Themes in the Literature	Sources
How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?	Intra-program Variation	Thomas et al. (2019); Cochran-Smith et al. (1999)
	Typologies of Social Justice Conceptions	Gorski (2009); Gorski & Parekh (2020); McDonald (2007); Juárez et al. (2008); Salvador & Kelly-McHale (2017); Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017)
What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?	Transition from Teacher to Teacher Educator	Zeichner (2005); Goodwin et al. (2014); Murray & Male (2005); Williams et al. (2012)
	Self-Study and Reflective Inquiry	Allen et al. (2016); DeMink-Carthew et al. (2017); Marin (2014); Logan & Butler, (2013); Vogel & Bartlett (2013)
	Communities of Practice	Cochran-Smith et al., (1999); Conklin, (2021); Curcio & Schroeder (2017); Ness et al., (2010)
	Background and Lived Experience	Metz (2018); Gist (2014); Jett & Cross (2016); Kelly-Jackson (2015)
	Doctoral Coursework	Ritter (2009); Shin (2013)
How if at all, do the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enact in their teaching practice when teaching social justice approaches to teachers?	Teaching Practices	Hosseini et al. (2024); Jacobs (2023)
	Challenges to Enactment	Cochran-Smith (2010); Hosseini et al. (2025); Jacobs (2023); Juárez & Hayes (2010); Kavanagh & Danielson (2020); Reagan & Hambacher (2021)

Literature on Social Justice Conceptions

Table 5. Literature on conceptions of social justice

Research Question	Themes in the Literature	Literature
How do four DSTE describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?	Intra-program Variation	Thomas et al. (2019); Cochran-Smith et al. (1999)
	Typologies of Social Justice Conceptions	Gorski (2009); Gorski & Parekh (2020); McDonald (2007); Juárez et al. (2008); Salvador & Kelly-McHale (2017); Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017)

In this section, I reviewed literature related to my first research question on DSTE conceptions of social justice. There are two themes from the review of this literature: 1) intra-program variations on conceptions of social justice and 2) typologies of social justice conceptions.

Intra-program Variations

Teacher educators, even within the same institution, have varying understandings of what the term “social justice” means (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; Thomas et al., 2019). This intra-program variation reinforces the assertion that there is no set criterion within Colleges of Education for what social justice and social justice teacher education entails. A lack of a single approach to SJTE is not necessarily a negative – teachers exposed to different approaches to social justice can widen their understanding around what social justice can entail. However, teachers are more likely to develop their views on diversity when a teacher program has a clear and consistent approach to social justice (Tatto, 1996).

Cochran-Smith et al. (1999) were a group of nine teacher educators who engaged in a collaborative research and professional development project that they named ‘Seeking Social Justice.’ One aspect of their research was questioning what social justice meant to them. They

examined their biases and understanding of equity, diversity, access, power, and social justice and found that their "...individual notions of social justice were wide ranging" (p. 239). When discussing social justice, the authors varied in their conceptions of social justice based on "the concepts of fairness and equity, the roles and responsibilities of institutions versus those of individuals regarding social justice and injustice, and the importance of individual versus collective beliefs and actions in advocating for social justice" (p. 238). This study shows that within a program, teacher educators have a broad range of social justice conceptions.

Thomas et al. (2019) conducted a study of 42 full-time teacher educators within a single teacher preparation program that explicitly emphasized social justice as a core component of its mission. Despite the program's formal commitment to social justice teacher education (SJTE), the researchers found significant variation in how faculty conceptualized social justice. While some faculty emphasized raising individual awareness and transforming beliefs, others insisted that SJTE must lead to tangible action, with one stating, "when I think of social justice, I think of understanding fairness and trying to do something about it, and action, so awareness and action" (p. 30). A key divide emerged between those who resisted positioning teacher candidates as "community activists" and those who embraced the role of "change agents." The study also found conflicting views on whether social justice efforts should target only teacher candidates or include institutional change within teacher education programs themselves. As one faculty member noted, "for social justice to really work, we have to begin at home... I question the hierarchical nature of our institution" (p. 30). These findings underscore the importance of surfacing and addressing internal disagreements to build cohesive and contextually grounded approaches to SJTE. The authors suggest the need for teacher educators to:

flesh out their underlying meanings about social justice so they can be clearer and more transparent about how and why they are enacting particular curricula, pedagogies, and

institutional practices that they claim under the mantle of social justice for greater coherence and impact (p.32)

In this dissertation, I aim to provide more transparency about DSTEs' conceptions of social justice and the connection between those conceptions and the practices in teacher education program classrooms. In the next section, I describe how the literature discusses different typologies of social justice conceptions. These different typologies help to illuminate the variation in teacher education programs.

Typologies of Social Justice Conceptions

The intra-program variations in conceptions of social justice suggest a degree of conceptual fragmentation, reflecting the complexity of how teacher educators understand and engage with social justice and SJTE. Typologies provide a way to better understand the variations between teacher educators' conceptions of social justice. In this study, I have adopted Gorski's (2009) typology. Gorski (2009), in a study of 45 multicultural and social justice teacher educators' syllabi, found that their courses represented a wide range of social justice conceptions. From his findings, Gorski developed a typology (see Appendix A) that is a helpful way to categorize this intra-programmatic variation in social justice conceptions. He defines conceptions of social justice along a spectrum from conservative to liberal to critical (explained in further detail in the theoretical framework). In brief, conservative conceptions of social justice are those that do not value diversity and teach teachers to have their students assimilate to the majority. Liberal conceptions of social justice are those that teach teachers to recognize diversity and use pedagogies that support diverse student learning. Critical conceptions of social justice are those that teach teachers critical pedagogies and how to address oppression at the individual and broader structural levels through advocacy and resistance. I describe these three areas of conceptions in further detail in this section and later in my theoretical framework.

Conservative Conceptions

Conservative conceptions of social justice are those that do not value diversity and teach teachers to have their students assimilate to the majority. The literature shows that there are teacher educators who coopt social justice for their own needs (Juárez et al., 2008) and that there are a significant portion of teacher educators who have a conservative conception of social justice (Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017).

Juárez et al. (2008) shared their own experiences as teacher educators teaching teachers about social justice. The authors argue that other teacher educators treated social justice as a way to make White people feel comfortable with diversity rather than to promote critical teaching that seeks to address injustice. The authors describe this version of social justice as being about “...positively managing White people’s emotions and helping them to maintain an image of themselves as good and innocent” (p. 23). The authors noted that many teacher educators took a formulaic approach to conceptions of social justice - something that can be taught to teachers if the program provided teachers with “...just the right amount of hours in the field, in just the right location, and with just the right instructor, activities, and readings” (p. 22). The authors had conceptions of social justice that took a critical perspective – questioning and challenging the norms of teacher education -that stated the oppressive nature of the Whiteness of teacher education but struggled with challenging that Whiteness because White teacher educators experiencing the challenges would have “emotions of defensiveness, guilt, and anger” (p. 23). Juárez et al. (2008) highlighted the prevalence of teacher educators who have a conservative approach to social justice and emphasized how much pushback teacher educators who adopt critical conceptions of social justice can face (see Appendix A).

Salvador and Kelly-McHale (2017) had similar findings to Juárez et al. (2008) despite adopting a very different methodology for examining teacher educators' perspectives towards social justice. Salvador and Kelly-McHale (2017) surveyed the conceptions of social justice of 356 music teacher educators at multiple U.S institution of higher education accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) The authors found that many music teacher educators adopt a conservative approach to social justice education – where they defined social justice as the equal treatment of students and that increased effort and ambition are enough to rectify any oppression. Many of the music teacher educators included in this study also ignored issues related to institutional power differentials and oppression. Although this study focuses specifically on music teacher educators' conceptions of social justice, it is useful evidence of teacher educator conceptions of social justice as it is one of the few studies on conceptions of social justice that examines many teacher educators from many different contexts. Most of the other studies on teacher educators examine a few teacher educators in one or two contexts. Salvador and Kelly-McHale (2017) found that about half of the respondents had conservative conceptions of social justice centered on “all people should be treated the same, regardless of any difference, or that opportunities should be the same for all people regardless of any difference” (p. 14). A smaller portion of the respondents (around 13%) focused on social justice as “embracing diversity and a strong sense of the value of multiculturalism in education” (p. 14). This approach focused on social justice being about viewing diversity positively. Around 22% of respondents in this study did define social justice through a critical frame – focusing on “institutions, power systems, actions, context, morals, and ethics.” (p. 14) A small portion (around 6%) challenged the idea of social justice and dismissed the invitation to define it. For example, one teacher educator stated that they were “Not really sure. I believe life and success

are up to you and you alone. I do not have time to teach this and music too—I hear sociology is an interesting field for those who are so inclined” (p. 15). This study provides evidence that there is only a small percentage of teacher educators who are adopting critical conceptions of social justice. This small percentage of teacher educators matters for DSTE’s because it illuminates the strong cultural norm of conservative approaches to learning in higher education and emphasizes how often they are actively resisted.

Liberal Conceptions

Liberal conceptions of social justice are those that teach teachers to recognize diversity and use pedagogies that support diverse student learning. It is common in teacher education programs for teachers to learn about topics such as the disproportionate discipline of students of color (Morris, 2012; Skiba, 2014) and the deficit mindsets of teachers (Delpit, 1995) – but not necessarily how to address those injustices or what contributes to them.

McDonald, (2007) in an examination of teacher educators’ conceptions of social justice, demonstrated that teacher educators from two teacher education programs had a range of conceptions of social justice. The conception of social justice “...most articulated by faculty emphasized addressing and attending to the needs of individual learners and when necessary, providing students with differential resources and opportunities” (p. 2062). McDonald argued that the reason for the focus on this version of social justice is likely because it aligned so closely with the state mandated teacher standards and the popular teaching principle “that teachers ought to attend to individual learners” (p. 2063). The conception of social justice as addressing broader systemic issues of oppression and structural inequality was less widely adopted by teacher educators, likely because it would “require faculty to explicitly stand outside the mainstream of what constitutes the role of teachers and teacher education within the field more generally” (p.

2063). Although liberal conceptions of social justice prioritize responsive pedagogies and support for individual student needs, they often stop short of interrogating or challenging the structural and systemic forces that produce educational inequities.

Critical Conceptions

Critical conceptions of social justice focus not only on addressing interpersonal inequities but also the broader systemic and structural dimensions of oppression. Teacher educators who adopt critical conceptions of social justice aim to prepare preservice teachers to engage with critical pedagogies (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011).

Furthermore, within this framework, teachers are positioned as potential agents of change who actively interrogate and disrupt structures that perpetuate inequality in schools and society (Kumashiro, 2009). Critical conceptions of social justice emphasize how structural inequities are organized along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, language, and ability, and how these inequities are normalized through institutional policies, curricula, and dominant cultural narratives (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This orientation challenges the myth of meritocracy and instead encourages teachers to examine how power and privilege shape educational outcomes and access.

Despite its transformative potential, critical conceptions of social justice remain underrepresented in teacher education. Gorski and Parekh (2020), in their national study of 186 teacher educators who taught multicultural, equity, or social justice-focused courses, found that only 29% adopted a critical approach, defined as one that centers structural oppression and prioritizes systemic change. The majority leaned toward liberal or conservative conceptions, which often emphasize tolerance, inclusion, or individual effort without examining systemic

causes. This imbalance signals a troubling disconnect between the theoretical imperatives of critical social justice and the realities of teacher education practice.

The marginalization of critical perspectives may stem from multiple factors, including institutional resistance, pressure to align with state teacher standards, and the discomfort some educators feel when addressing issues of power and privilege (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). As a result, social justice teacher education is often diluted or fragmented, failing to fully equip educators with the tools to enact justice in complex and contested educational landscapes.

Summary

The studies reviewed in this section revealed that teacher educators hold a wide range of conceptions of social justice. However, there is limited research exploring how these conceptions are formed, or whether doctoral student teacher educators (DSTEs) share similar understandings. Additionally, the term “social justice” is often used without clear or consistent definition, leading to conceptual ambiguity across the literature. These gaps underscore the need to examine how DSTEs conceptualize social justice, which informs my first research question: *How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?* The following section examines research on how teacher educators develop these conceptions.

Literature on Developing Conceptions of Social Justice

Table 6. Literature on developing conceptions of social justice

Research Question	Themes in the Literature	Literature
What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice?	Transition from Teacher to Teacher Educator	Zeichner (2005); Goodwin et al. (2014); Murray & Male (2005); Williams et al. (2012)
	Self-Study and Reflective Inquiry	Allen et al. (2016); DeMink-Carthew et al. (2017); Marin (2014); Logan & Butler, (2013); Vogel & Bartlett (2013)
	Communities of Practice	Cochran-Smith et al., (1999); Conklin, (2021); Curcio &

		Schroeder (2017); Ness et al., (2010), Shin (2013)
	Background and Lived Experience	Metz (2018); Gist (2014); Jett & Cross (2016); Kelly-Jackson (2015)
	Combination of Factors	Ritter (2009)

In this section, I reviewed literature related to my second research question on DSTE development of conceptions of social justice. There are five themes that emerged from the review of this literature: 1) the transition from teacher to teacher educator, 2) self-study and reflective inquiry, 3) communities of practice, 4) background and lived experiences, and 5) doctoral coursework and theory. This literature reveals that comparative case studies are needed to illuminate how different teacher educators develop their conceptions of social justice. Such studies can deepen our scholarly understanding of DSTE development and provide practical insights that teacher education programs can use to more effectively support emerging educators. This gap in literature informs my second research question: What experiences contribute to the development of four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?

Transition from Teacher to Teacher Educator

The transition from teacher to teacher educator is an important moment in shaping the development of teacher educators. Despite the importance of this shift, teacher educators are often unprepared by teacher education programs to teach teachers, instead programs focus on preparing them as researchers (Zeichner, 2005). Without preparation to engage in the pedagogy of preparing teachers, many teacher educators are at a loss for how to engage in a variety of practices to support teacher learning, including those that prepare teachers to adopt a social justice approach to their teaching. In a nationwide survey of 293 teacher educators, Goodwin et al. (2014) found that most teacher educators, and particularly those who are more experienced

and White, do not prioritize diversity and multiculturalism issues in their teaching. This lack of the prioritization of social justice is also visible in the literature on teacher educator development. In an examination of studies from the US, the UK, and Australia (2010-2016) on teacher education in relation to social justice, Goodwin and Darity (2019) found that only 76 out of 1700 articles addressed social justice in some capacity. This small percentage of studies “provides compelling evidence that teacher educators, whether in the UK, US or Australia, need to develop their understanding, research, and practices further around social justice education if they truly intend to prepare teachers who can be advocates for vulnerable and marginalized students” (Goodwin & Darity, 2019, p. 73).

Murray and Male (2005) examined the transition from teacher-to-teacher educator. First, learning to become a teacher educator is a complex process that most often involves teachers transitioning from being first-order practitioners in schools to second-order practitioners in higher-education (Murray & Male, 2005). With this transition, there are “feelings of professional unease and discomfort...” (p. 138). These feelings stem from new teacher educators being treated as experts despite being “novice in terms of developing new pedagogies for second-order work...” (p. 138). In a review of teacher educator self-study literature, Williams et al. (2012) stated similar findings that becoming a teacher educator involves teachers brokering a new context of the university with past lives as teachers. This process of grappling with identity was easier for more experienced teachers who felt more confident about their university teaching than less experienced classroom teachers who embraced “more traditional and didactic teaching approaches more readily” (p. 248) This difference between more experienced and less experienced DSTE should be considered when thinking about when DSTE chose to adopt certain conceptions of social justice. In a discussion of the U.S. teacher education context,

Zeichner (2005) highlighted that many teacher education programs lack support for teacher educators. He noted that teacher education is treated as a “self-evident activity” (p. 118) and that the emphasis for doctoral students is to develop as educational researchers rather than as teacher educators. The result of this ambivalence towards teacher education is that many teacher educators must take a “seat of the pants” approach to running teacher education programs—making educational decisions without scholarly evidence (p. 123). Goodwin et al. (2014) provides more evidence of the disregard for developing teacher educators by describing the coincidental nature of becoming a teacher educator – “many academics who may be hired to do teacher education work are not necessarily prepared, qualified, or even choose to do this work” (p. 298). These studies (Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005; Williams et al., 2012; Zeichner, 2005) indicate that DSTE’s often become teacher educators without formal institutional support. Without formal support, teacher educators are likely relying on other informal approaches for developing their conceptions of social justice.

Self-Study

Performing self-study was an important mechanism for DSTE development as it led to iterative cycles of questioning, experimentation, and analysis. These cycles helped DSTE’s not only reflect on their instructional choices but also refine their practice in conversation with trusted peers.

Marin (2014) describes self-study as a “powerful experience for me as a teacher educator and a means to explore my teaching practice at the university level” (p. 33). She used self-study to explore her pedagogy and identity as a DSTE, showing how sustained reflection allowed her to interrogate her assumptions and refine her instructional stance. Allen et al. (2016), also supports the impact of self-study on DSTE development. The authors examined a DSTE’s early

teaching experiences and found that self-study, combined with engagement in a broader community of practice, was pivotal for shifting professional identity and enhancing confidence.

While individual self-study fosters critical awareness, its impact deepens when DSTEes engage in collaborative reflection through what Costa and Kallick (1993) term “critical friendships.” Logan and Butler (2013) analyzed their own critical friendship as two doctoral students assigned to teach elementary social studies methods. They found that their relationship provided “pedagogical, affective, and intellectual support” (p. 268). Pedagogically, they shared curricular resources and teaching strategies; emotionally, they supported each other’s feelings of outsidership and exhaustion, and intellectually, they engaged in critical examination of structural constraints and course goals. They drew on Costa and Kallick’s (1993) framing of a critical friend as someone who can “ask provocative questions, provide data to be examined through another lens, and offer critique of a person’s work as a friend” (p. 50). Their study revealed how a critical relationship can help mitigate imposter syndrome and instill a sense of professional capability. Their experiences also led to tangible changes in practice, such as revised course assignments, additional peer input, and the restricting of coursework to center on broad thematic goals.

Similarly, Vogel and Bartlett (2013) investigated a teaching internship between Amanda, a doctoral student, and Andrea, her mentor and a professor. Although the study initially centered on Amanda’s development, it revealed a reciprocal transformation. During their collaborative self-study, they both ended up making changes to their approaches as teacher educators. Their dialectic journals captured how the collaboration “brought both of us greater clarity and renewed enthusiasm for our chosen field” (p. 137) This study reinforces the finding that collaborative self-studies support DSTE development through social learning.

Extending the theme of social learning, DeMink-Carthew et al. (2017) conducted a collaborative self-study involving four emerging teacher educators. They framed their inquiry as grounded in “action, reflection, collaboration, and inquiry connected to the profession of teacher education” (p. 102). Their work examined core practices, such as planning instruction, modeling pedagogy, and assessing learning, while also surfacing tensions related to identity development. As they conducted their collaborative self-study, they found that the repetitive cycles of questioning pushed them to “question and reflect on the work we were doing and its impact on candidates’ learning, as well as our own” (p. 96). Their findings reinforce the claim that meaningful learning for DSTEes often emerges from dialogic relationships and collective inquiry, especially when situated within the real challenges of teacher preparation.

These studies suggest that self-study, particularly when enacted through critical friendships and communities of practice, is a powerful learning process for DSTEes. Wenger (1998) emphasized that “learning transforms who we are and what we can do” (p. 215) through participation in shared practice. For SJTE, collaborative self-study provides DSTEes with opportunities to critically examine, challenge, and deepen their pedagogical beliefs in response to lived classroom experiences, peer dialogue, and institutional constraints. These findings inform this study’s second research question: What experiences contribute to the development of four DSTEes’ conceptions of social justice? In the next section, we explore how social learning through communities of practice supports DSTE development.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (CoP), often structured as doctoral seminars or regular group meetings, is another method that DSTEes have used to develop as teacher educators (Dinkelman et al., 2012). The basic structure of these communities of practice involved learning activities

implemented during a 2-3.5 hour meeting every 1-4 weeks for 3-12 months' duration. There would often be other learning activities, such as journaling and reading, that occur outside of the meeting time. Like critical friendship in self-study, communities of practice provide DSTEs with an opportunity to be supported in their reflection but also provided more opportunities to learn content around teacher education (Dinkelman et al., 2012). As I describe below in my theoretical framework, belonging to these communities of practice shapes “not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do.” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). In this section, I describe five studies: two on teacher educators (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; Ness et al., 2010) and three on DSTEs (Conklin, 2021; Curcio & Schroeder, 2017; Shin, 2013), discuss the impact of a CoP on DSTE development, and the processes involved in CoP learning.

There are two studies on teacher educators that provide evidence for how DSTEs might develop their social justice conceptions through social learning processes of COPs (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; Ness et al., 2010). While these studies do not involve DSTEs, they are valuable in understanding how a group of teacher educators can develop their social justice conceptions through social participation (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; Ness et al., 2010). Earlier in the literature review, I discussed how Cochran-Smith et al., (1999) showed how there was intra-program variation inside teacher education programs. The study also presented evidence of the process of teacher educators learning in a community of practice. The authors of the study were a group of nine teacher educators who developed their conceptions of social justice through collaborative discussions. Over a two-year period, they organized seven discussions and further meetings to examine their own understandings of social justice issues. The goal of these discussions was to refine their own understandings to help their preservice teachers do the same

and encourage students them to work for social change and meet the needs of a diverse K-12 student body. The authors found that the discussions:

“influenced individual beliefs and perspectives and made possible new insights into the perspectives of others.... Talking about social justice also influenced who we were as a department and how we carried out the daily work of teacher education-negotiating policies, establishing practices, developing curriculum and working with students” (p. 239).

This evidence supports my assertion that teacher educators getting together and discussing approaches to engaging in SJTE can impact their conceptions of social justice.

Ness et al. (2010) also examined how teacher educators learned from an ongoing collaborative discussion on social justice. They described how collaboration over the course of three years expanded their knowledge and understandings of social justice and increased social justice actions in their teaching. Initial discussion was centered around definitions of the term social justice. They found that for some teacher educators their definitions were “largely shaped by an online dictionary” and “reading relevant literature” (p. 93). The developing of conceptions of social justice happened through sharing and making it “tangible” (p. 93). Discussion and disagreement over conceptions of social justice helped to change and refine those conceptions.

Three studies focused on DSTEs and how they developed social justice conceptions through communities of practice (Conklin, 2021; Curcio & Schroeder, 2017; Shin, 2013). In a collaborative reflection on their experiences in a community of practice focused on social justice, Curcio and Schroeder (2017) found that the community of practice helped them to develop their conceptions of social justice. They noted that they “both possessed a passion for enhancing the educational opportunities for marginalized student populations” (p. 10). However, they realized

that they lacked theoretical knowledge to effectively articulate their passion. It was only “during a doctoral critical pedagogy seminar focused on critical social justice theory, [that they] began to acquire essential knowledge that informed [their] developing social justice stance” (p. 10).

The authors attributed their ability to develop their social justice conceptions to their community of practice, which provided a “space to dialogue and reflect on course content and pedagogical decisions, as well as successes and failures I was experiencing in the classroom. The ability to share frustrations and potential roadblocks became a source of support and knowledge to assist me in refining my practice as a teacher educator committed to social justice” (p. 11).

Furthermore, the doctoral seminar exposed them to academic literature that helped to extend their “theoretical and pedagogical knowledge” (p. 11-12).

Similarly, Shin (2013) examined how two experienced music educators, enrolled in a cohort-based doctoral program, experienced coursework as a site for both conceptual and relational learning. Coursework introduced participants to new theoretical frameworks, as one participant explained, coursework “explained more [about] what we were doing like theoretical ways, more frameworks about [what] we were thinking” (p. 11). While coursework revealed new theoretical understandings to view the world with, it was discussions with peers that encouraged participants to internalize and enact those understandings. As one participant noted, “everyone else in my classes were [like] teachers to me” (p. 10). The structured cohort experiences and regular group work fostered a sense of belonging and trust, enabling participants to critically reflect on their teaching and seek feedback and support. Drawing on Wenger’s (1998) framework, Shin argued that these interactions evolved into communities of practice that helped doctoral students “learn from others and develop shared repertoire about music education” (p. 15).

Conklin (2021) developed a doctoral seminar as a community of practice aimed at helping DSTE's develop an understanding of compassionate, critical, justice-oriented teacher education (Conklin, 2008). The course pedagogy involved studying cases (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2002), modeling practices (Loughran & Berry, 2005), and action research (Price & Valli, 2005). The DSTE learning was focused on developing both conceptual and practical tools (Grossman et al. 1999) for teaching approaches to SJTE. Conceptual tools are theories, principles, and frameworks that help DSTE's to make instructional decisions. Practical tools are specific instructional practices and resources. Conklin interviewed 4 out of the 10 DSTE's that participated in the course, 5 years after the course finished. She found that the DSTE's took away practical tools from the course, such as debriefing questions and the case approach. With regards to social justice, she found that "offering next generation teacher educators an array of tools that highlight justice-oriented goals can provide both conceptual and practical starting places for their work" (p. 13). Learning about conceptual theories of justice and the practical tools to implement those theories helped the next generation teacher educators to apply social justice in their own teaching of teachers. While Conklin (2021) did discuss DSTE's processes of development, she did not specifically discuss what conceptions of social justice the DSTE's were implementing in their classrooms. This literature on communities of practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; Ness et al., 2010; Conklin, 2021; Curcio & Schroeder, 2017; Shin, 2013) revealed how COPs, and the social learning they foster, help teacher educators and DSTE's to develop their conceptions of teaching. However, the literature base that connects our understanding of communities of practice, DSTE's, and social justice remains small and underdeveloped. There is a need for more studies that connect processes for development with conceptions of social justice to determine how DSTE's are developing their conceptions of social justice (Gorski, 2009). In this dissertation,

I aim to add to this limited literature base to improve understanding around communities of practice, DSTEs, and social justice.

Background Experiences

DSTEs' background experiences - such as teacher education program, K-12 teaching experiences, and school experiences are also influential on their conceptions of social justice. Metz (2018) studied two parallel sections of a single teacher education course on diversity taught by two different teacher educators to find the impact that motivations and personal histories can have on how a course is taught. This study highlights the impact of personal experiences on course focus showing that teacher educators' teaching is impacted by personal experiences and motivation. One teacher educator focused on gender and sexuality, critically examining heteronormative ideals while the other teacher educator using the same readings, focused more on issues of race and ethnic identity. The differences between the course focus by the two teacher educators likely stems from their personal histories. One teacher educator (a White heteronormative female teacher educator) stated that "Because my brother is gay, I am very, very attentive to gender and sexuality issues." (p. 24) whereas the other teacher educator (a black female heteronormative teacher educator) stated that "I've worked in a lot of schools where teachers were predominantly White, middle class, and women for the most part, and . . . it became clear to me that the questions, the frustrations that people were having with their class were . . . around race" (p. 25). This article shows how different lived experiences can impact a teacher educator's choice for how to engage in teaching social justice teaching approaches to teachers. Similarly, Jett and Cross (2016), in a collaborative reflection from two teacher educators about teaching a diversity course, shared their differences based on their past experiences. One teacher educator, an African American male, grew up in a city and was a

product of an urban public school system. He had taught a diverse student body and framed his scholarship with critical race theory. His focus in class was to build respect through “... community-building exercises [to establish] a mutual foundation of respect among class members and instructor alike” (p. 135). In contrast, the other teacher educator was a White, middle-class female who noted that her “...own K-12 and college experiences lacked diversity – everyone looked like and had similar experiences to me” (p.137). She was constantly questioning her ability to teach the diversity class as a White teacher educator. Clearly, personal experiences and background have an influence on DSTE’s conceptions of social justice. In this study, I aim to expand the understanding on how these past experiences influence the current DSTE’s conceptions of social justice.

I include a study on teacher educators here, rather than DSTE’s, as it provides an important insight into how DSTE’s might be pulled towards certain conceptions of social justice. In an examination of 11 teacher educators, Gist (2014) described how they became committed to social justice. Gist highlighted the wide array of push and pull factors that led teacher educators to teach for social justice - “very different experiences and obstacles guided [teacher educators’] journey to Sunnyside Teacher Education Program. A common theme across these teacher educators, however, is that they are committed to strengthening the pedagogical instruction that students of color experience in the teacher education classroom and K–12 schools” (p. 271). For example, one teacher educator had a “deep commitment to organizing the Mexicano community for empowerment” (p. 272). Other teacher educators were committed to social justice because “...they cared about the cultural and linguistic diversity in their teacher education classrooms” (p. 279). While Gist’s study does not provide an understanding of the specific moments that led these teacher educators to make commitments to teaching social justice, it does provide some

understanding of how past social justice beliefs lead teacher educators to teach for social justice. For instance, one teacher educator was guided by learning social critical theory that provided her with the “liberating tools she needed to understand the pain of the cultural denial and the shame she had shouldered through most of the schooling experiences” (p. 272).

Kelly-Jackson (2015) had a similar finding in a self-study on her personal experiences and their impact on her engagement in teaching teachers social justice approaches to teaching. She found that her development as a teacher educator was due to a combination of her childhood experiences, education, and doctoral coursework. As an African American female science teacher, she noted that she did not understand how her lived experiences impacted her journey towards social justice and her focus on teaching about socioeconomic status and race until she started her doctoral program. She was raised in poverty outside of a small town in rural South Carolina. She experienced educational injustices – such as disproportionate discipline – firsthand, sharing that: “The majority of my teachers were White females who lived in or near the school’s town. They were obviously very passionate about teaching but equally as prejudiced against African American students – males in particular” (p. 173). After learning about social justice and different related theories she “began using [her] lived experiences to guide [her] instruction” (Kelly-Jackson, 2015, p. 174). Kelly-Jackson (2015) shows that past experiences in combination with learning about the concept of social justice can have an important impact on a teacher educator’s conceptions of social justice.

Together, these studies highlight the important role that personal histories and K–12 teaching experiences play in shaping DSTE’s conceptions of social justice. While not all studies explicitly focus on social justice, they reveal how background experiences and identity inform what and how teacher educators choose to emphasize in their teaching. These findings point to

the developmental complexity of DSTE's and suggest that conceptions of social justice are not formed in isolation but through accumulated and contextualized life experiences.

Combination of Factors

In this literature review, I have argued that self-study, communities of practice, and background experiences shape DSTE's development. However, the reality for many DSTE's is that their development will involve a combination of these factors. Two studies (Ritter, 2009; Jacobs; 2023) highlight this combination of experiences that support DSTE development.

Ritter's (2009) qualitative self-study traced the evolution of his vision as he transitioned from classroom teacher to teacher educator. He identified a combination of four sources of growth: completing graduate coursework, engaging in the work of teacher education, collaborating with peers, and studying his own practice. His coursework led him to challenge his assumptions on curriculum, knowledge, and the purposes of schooling. As he reflected, graduate study "encouraged [him] to reflect on the personal experiences and understandings of teaching and learning that [he] brought with [him] to [his] graduate studies, and to reconsider them in light of [his] developing ideas regarding teacher education" (p. 48). For Ritter, this led to a vision oriented towards democratic aims and critical inquiry. Ritter (2009) highlights how DSTE development occurs not in isolation, but through interaction with theory, with peers, and with practice

Jacobs (2023), in an examination of six DSTE's, found similarities to Ritter (2009) in regard to DSTE development. DSTE's are developing through a combination of factors influenced their learning of pedagogy. First, they developed a theoretical basis for the act of teaching preservice teachers through their coursework and experiences in their program. Second, they developed knowledge through coursework and exposure to new theories including

culturally responsive teaching and equity-focused pedagogy. Third, they developed their practice through a community of practice, the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Research Group (CRTG), “which met once a month to share resources, engage in book studies, self-study projects, and discuss problems of practice” (p. 164). DSTEs described the CRTG as a “space to critically reflect on prior experiences and to build a shared language for justice-oriented teaching” (p. 173).

Not all DSTEs experience all of these different development opportunities. As Jacobs (2023) argued, there is a continuum of learning she terms the “depth of praxis,” ranging “from no professional learning experiences, to participation in discussion groups, to engagement in doctoral coursework, collaborative self-study, and co-teaching” (p. 174). Jacobs argued that “the more opportunities participants had to integrate theory and practice in authentic contexts, the deeper their praxis became” (p. 174). It is important to consider not just that a DSTE is engaging in praxis, but that they are engaging in a complex interwoven fabric of supports. Conklin (2021) provided a summary of this complexity of factors on development:

the participants’ learning and practice came out of a complex convergence of their own personal backgrounds as well as formal and informal learning experiences. The next generation teacher educators who participated in this study also worked as teacher educators while engaged in their doctoral studies (and our course), participated in studies of their own teacher education practice, had a community of peer teacher educators with a shared vision that allowed for many informal conversations with peers, and engaged in additional other formal course study focused on teacher education—influences. (p. 12)

This body of research directly informs this study’s second research question: What experiences contribute to the development of four DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice? The factors that lead to DSTE development include doctoral coursework, collaborative inquiry, and practice-based reflection.

Summary

DSTE development of social justice conceptions is likely complex and multifaceted. However, the literature on DSTE development remains limited, with most studies relying on self-study methodologies that center one or two individuals, making it difficult to describe the complex nature of DSTE development as it relates to social justice. To address this gap, this study employs a multiple case study approach to examine how a diverse group of DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice. By offering comparative analysis across cases, this dissertation extends the current literature and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the pathways through which DSTEs develop their social justice conceptions. These insights can inform more intentional and effective support structures within teacher education programs.

Literature on Teacher Educator Practices for Teaching Social Justice to Teachers

Table 7. Literature on teacher educator practices related to social justice

Research Question	Themes in Literature	Literature
How if at all, do the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enact in their teaching practice when teaching social justice approaches to teachers?	Teaching Practices	Hosseini et al .(2024); Jacobs (2023)
	Challenges to Enactment	Cochran-Smith (2010); Hosseini et al. (2025); Jacobs (2023); Juárez & Hayes (2010); Kavanagh & Danielson (2020); Reagan & Hambacher (2021)

In this section, I review literature related to my third research question: How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching? Numerous pedagogical frameworks have been developed to support K–12 teachers in enacting justice in their classrooms, including asset-based pedagogy (Moll et al., 1992), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2013), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1970). These frameworks help teachers to center students' lives, promote equity, and challenge deficit-based notions of

learning. However, little attention has been paid by scholars to understanding how teacher educators teach teachers to adopt such pedagogical stances (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; Kavanagh, 2017; Goodwin & Darity, 2019). After reviewing literature on teacher educator, two interrelated themes emerged: (1) variety of social justice teacher educator practices exist and (2) there are a variety of barriers to enactment. I discuss each in turn next.

Social Justice Teacher Educator Practices

The literature on social justice teacher educator practices (Hosseini et al. 2024; Jacobs, 2023) highlights a variety of social justice practices that teacher educators can adopt to teach their teachers about social justice. To understand the alignment between DSTEs' conceptions of social justice and their teaching practices, it is important to understand teaching practices teacher educators have used to teach teachers about social justice. Hosseini et al. (2024), in a comprehensive review of 60 empirical studies, identified five common practices that social justice teacher educators (SJTEs) use to engage preservice teachers in social justice teaching:

1. Critical Incident Analysis
2. Acknowledging Marginalized Perspectives
3. Stimulating Awareness of Context, Community, and Activism
4. Striving for Socially Just Instruction and Teaching Practices
5. Disrupting Hierarchies in Knowledge Creation

Teacher educators enacted these practices through a range of instructional moves, such as counter-storytelling, translanguaging, curriculum reconstruction, community-engaged learning, dialogic teaching, and reflective self-study, that aim to connect theory with local, relational, and systemic justice efforts.

Another common practice is that of modeling. Loughran and Berry (2005) argued, modeling is not simply demonstrating effective pedagogy but making its rationale explicit, what they call “meta-learning.” This meta-learning helps preservice teachers understand both the how and the why of practice, particularly when addressing complex issues like race, power, and privilege. Jacobs and Perez (2023) reinforced this need for explicit modeling in their study of new graduate teacher educators (NGTEs), who described the necessity of applying what they were learning by enacting justice-oriented pedagogies in the classroom. These practices included co-constructing knowledge with students, designing culturally responsive environments, and facilitating critical dialogue. Crucially, Jacobs and Perez (2023) warn that reflection without praxis risks becoming performative: “The NGTEs had to engage in justice not only theoretically but practically” (p. 12).

This literature shows that there are teacher educators who are enacting social justice practices when preparing teachers. However, scholars have documented numerous challenges to enacting social justice in teacher education, including structural constraints, ideological tensions, and emotional labor (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Hosseini et al., 2025; Jacobs, 2023; Juárez & Hayes, 2010; Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021).

Barriers to Enactment

Despite widespread rhetorical commitments to social justice in teacher education, research consistently reveals gaps between what teacher educators believe and what they are able to enact in practice. These misalignments point to deeper structural, cultural, and emotional barriers that complicate efforts to teach in justice-centered ways.

Kavanagh and Danielson (2020), in a qualitative multiple case study of three teacher education programs known for equity commitments, found that although justice was emphasized

in mission statements and coursework, it was rarely integrated into pedagogical practice. Instead, programs prioritized content-neutral routines such as “turn-and-talks” or “checking for understanding,” without explicitly addressing race, power, or structural inequality. Without intentional integration of justice into pedagogical moves, efforts to advance equity remained abstract or superficial. Similarly, Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) found that competing policy logics and external accountabilities, such as accreditation standards and standardized assessments, create conditions that actively pull programs away from critical, justice-oriented work. The authors, through a conceptual and policy analysis of teacher education reform movements, found that the rise of neoliberal accountability in teacher education created environments that privileged compliance over critique, undermining the enactment of socially just pedagogy.

Juárez and Hayes (2010) argue that institutions are not just prioritizing content-neutral practices or deprioritizing social justice but are actively combatant against social justice efforts. In a two-person critical race theory counter-storytelling study, they analyzed their own experiences as scholars teaching for social justice in predominantly White institutions. Through collaborative self-study and narrative inquiry, they highlighted the institution’s active resistance to authentic SJTE. They described how superficial “diversity” efforts served to regulate which forms of difference were deemed acceptable— “not too Black or too Brown” (p. 242) — and emphasized the emotional toll of engaging in SJTE while simultaneously “doing battle” with students and colleagues (p. 244).

Hosseini et al. (2025) noted the negative impact that these barriers had on teacher educators. The authors conducted a scoping literature review of 60 empirical studies on preservice social justice teacher education (SJTE), published between 2010 and 2020. Using PRISMA guidelines, the authors analyzed how teacher educators conceptualize and enact social

justice in their teaching. The review revealed recurring challenges such as teacher educators' uncertainty around intervening in harmful classroom discourse, the burden of decentering Whiteness within dominant institutions, and the emotional complexity of supporting students through nonlinear, embodied learning trajectories. These tensions were magnified for educators from marginalized backgrounds, who often bore disproportionate emotional and representational labor (see also Conrad et al., 2010).

Jacobs (2023), in a cross-case analysis of six novice graduate teacher educators (NGTEs), examined how these early-career instructors navigated the challenges of justice-oriented teaching. Despite identifying as equity-focused, participants often reverted to conventional, non-critical instructional approaches when faced with institutional expectations, student resistance, or personal uncertainty. The study highlights the emotional and practical challenges DSTE face in translating conceptions of justice into actual teaching practices.

These studies reveal that DSTE's ability to teach about social justice is not a default outcome of good intentions, it must be actively designed, supported, and sustained within teacher education programs. The literature points to the need for a pedagogy of teacher educator preparation that equips DSTE to reflect on, rehearse, and enact justice-centered teaching in complex, constrained environments. As Jacobs (2023) argue, this work must be recursive and collective not aspirational or individual.

By focusing on the lived experiences of four DSTE across coursework and field placements, my study addresses a critical gap in the literature. It offers insight into how DSTE navigate institutional constraints, emotional tensions, and pedagogical uncertainties as they attempt to translate their social justice conceptions into practice. This research contributes to

ongoing efforts to better prepare and support the next generation of social justice teacher educators.

Summary

Although a robust body of literature addresses social justice frameworks for K–12 teachers, few studies examine how DSTEs enact these frameworks in their own teaching. Existing research tends to focus on tenured faculty or program-level efforts; my dissertation instead centers the experiences of DSTEs, who occupy complex dual roles as learners and instructors. While Jacobs (2023) begins to explore this space, my study extends the work by analyzing how DSTEs conceptualize and enact justice in both coursework and field experiences. This research informs doctoral preparation, mentorship, and program design that seek not only to teach about social justice but to embody it as a pedagogical practice.

Chapter 3: Methods

For this dissertation, I used a qualitative multiple case study to answer my research questions. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore a complex phenomenon of the social world (Merriam, 1998). In this study, I explore the complex phenomenon of how DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice and the practices they use when teaching social justice approaches to teachers. The research questions for this study are:

1. How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?
2. What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?
3. How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?

Qualitative research is useful in exploring “situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Thus, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because the development of DSTEs is closely tied to the context of the teacher education program. Specifically, I adopt a case study that is an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 37). The bounded system is “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 38). The cases examined in this study are four individual DSTEs bounded by their university context and a specific focus on the teaching of social justice to teachers. Yin (2009) described the examination of an individual as the “classic case study” (p. 29) as it is a common and concrete way of examining a real-world phenomenon. The case study provides an in-depth description (Creswell et al., 2007) of a phenomenon – in this case - how DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice and what practices they use to teach teachers about social justice. Furthermore, case studies are appropriate for answering research questions that require an explanatory approach (Yin, 2009) (see Table 3.1). In this study, I do not manipulate how DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice, rather I aim to examine their conceptions of social justice to explain how development of their perspectives on social justice occurs. In this chapter, I will describe in more detail my positionality, the setting and participants, data collection and analysis, and the considerations I took to try and ensure an ethical, reliable, and valid research study.

Table 8. Study outline

Research Question	Problem	Data Sources
How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?	The term “social justice” is ambiguous and the conceptions of social justice that DSTEs are adopting is unclear in the existing literature.	Survey Interviews
What experiences contribute to the development of the four	The existing literature does not offer a clear understanding of how	Interviews

DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?	DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice.	
How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?	The existing literature does not offer a clear understanding of the practices DSTEs use when implementing social justice teacher education.	Interviews Observations Course Artifacts

Positionality

“[Readers] want to know what prompts our interest in the topics we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study,” (Wolcott, 2010, p. 36)

As Wolcott (2010) noted, readers are likely interested in how my identity impacts the study. I grew up in the United Kingdom in a setting where privilege was largely invisible to me. I attended a private school where nearly everyone looked like me: White, middle class, and financially secure. I did not have conversations about race, inequality, or power either at home or at school. University was much the same: I could move through life without ever having to think about injustice. When I entered my teacher education program, I carried that same unexamined perspective into classrooms. My first placement was in a school where every student was a student of color, and for the first time I became aware of my Whiteness. I noticed difference, but not the systems that produced it. When a parent once described how race shaped her son’s school experience, I listened and tried to empathize but didn’t understand. At the time, I equated social justice with closing achievement gaps and “treating all students fairly,” unaware of how shallow that understanding really was.

It was not until my doctoral program that I began to reflect more deeply on social justice and my role in perpetuating injustices. My awakening came gradually, sparked by conversations with doctoral students of color during the racist rhetoric of Donald Trump during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. I began to see how easily I had moved through the world without

recognizing structural inequity simply because it did not directly affect me. A conversation with one peer still lingers in my mind. When I offered reassurance after the election stating that “We’ll get through this” he replied, “Your life can go on being the same. Mine can’t.” That exchange crystallized my realization: my privilege had always given me the option not to notice. It was at that moment, and through the relationships that followed, that I began to understand social justice not as an abstract concept but as a lived and relational practice, something that required listening, humility, and continual self-examination.

As a doctoral student in Language, Literacy, and Social Inquiry at the University of Maryland, I was assigned to the role of DSTE both as a teaching assistant and instructor in two different teacher education courses during my first semester as part of my program funding. These initial placements were in areas where I had little expertise: social studies and classroom management. I received minimal preparation or support for the roles. I quickly became overwhelmed by the demands of teaching teachers. That struggle became the starting point of my inquiry: why was this approach to DSTE preparation so common, and what did it reveal about the structures of teacher education?

In response to this struggle, I began working with peers to form a community of practice for DSTEs. Through that group, I came to see my own challenges mirrored in others’ experiences: uncertainty, lack of mentorship, and the complexity of teaching about social justice and equity. These conversations deepened my curiosity about how DSTEs learn to teach and how they develop their pedagogy. Over time, my focus evolved from understanding how DSTEs learn to teach teachers, to exploring how they learn to teach for social justice. As a former elementary teacher striving for culturally responsive pedagogy, these dialogues with peers reframed my perspective. I came to see social justice not as a discrete instructional goal, but as a

continuous process of growth - for myself, for other DSTE's, and for the systems that shape teacher education.

Where does this position me in the research? I initially began my dissertation interested in how DSTE's learned to teach teachers and developed their pedagogy. When I wrote my initial proposal draft, I kept feeling like something was missing. I kept getting drawn back to that moment in 2016 and hearing "your life can go on being the same. Mine can't." I decided that I needed to incorporate social justice into my work and focus not just on how DSTE's develop their pedagogy, but how they develop their pedagogy around social justice teacher education. Through this dissertation, I hoped to learn from other DSTE's who are working towards integrating social justice into their teaching of teachers and in turn improve my own efforts at SJTE.

This journey has shaped the focus of my research and provided me with insider status to examine DSTE's. This status comes with the benefits of being able to relate to participants' knowledge and experiences. However, I need to acknowledge that shared experiences and knowledge does not mean sameness and that my identity as a White heterosexual male impacts my research questions, data collection, data analysis, and research focus, as well as the experiences that I had as a DSTE (Milner, 2007).

An important aspect of research is for researchers to be "self-critical and self-reflecting" (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008, p. 5). In this dissertation, I use Milner's (2007) positionality framework (see Appendix B) to support my self-reflection to recognize my bias and attempt to minimize its impact on my research. Researchers should question: (1) self (2) self in relation to others (3) how they are representing participants and (4) self in connection to a broader system (Milner, 2007). As a White heterosexual male educator, I am in danger of approaching research in a color- or culture-blind manner. Milner (2007) argued "Researchers privilege the experiences,

needs, and interests of White teachers, and teachers of color are often ignored” (p. 394). To attempt to address my potential bias, I used multiple data sources and member checking. Furthermore, I constantly memoed as a self-reflecting process – using the questions that support self-reflection on bias that Milner (2007) presented in his framework. For instance, I found that, as a White individual, my own racial identity and the racial identity of my participants was not always at the forefront of my mind during the research process. As Whiteness is positioned as the “status quo”, I benefit from that normalization by not automatically having to consider it. I had to be intentional to consider how race (mine and my participants’) played a role in my analysis.

The Setting and Participants

Yin (2018) argued that a phenomenon should be studied within a real-world context. My case study focuses on DSTE’s conceptions of social justice – what conceptions they have, how they developed those conceptions, and how those conceptions enact in their teaching of teachers. I examine these foci in the real-world context of DSTE teaching teachers in a university setting. The setting for my study is a large Mid-Atlantic public research university. The teacher education program follows AAQEP standards and states goals of equity and diversity (see Appendix C for Diversity Statement). Furthermore, diversity, social justice, and inclusion are explicitly stated as values of the teacher education program. Many doctoral students in the teacher education program are assigned the role of DSTE as part of their programmatic funding. The candidates studying to be K-12 teachers, within the programs where the DSTE teach, are required to take coursework on diversity, equity, and social justice. For example, in the elementary education track teachers are required to take three courses on culturally responsive literacy instruction, critical literacy, and teaching students with disabilities. Also, the state

requirements for teaching licensure mandates that teachers are prepared to teach in high poverty, culturally diverse, and linguistically diverse schools. The teachers are required to identify and apply culturally responsive teaching and assess their own biases.

I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) to select DSTEs who stated an interest in social justice and who had taught or were teaching teachers. The participants were chosen based on convenience of location – all coming from the same university that I am studying in. This non-random selection can introduce bias, however, this bias does not diminish the importance of the study as its goal is to gain insights and explore a phenomenon (DSTEs' conceptions of social justice and the teaching practices that they use to teach teachers about social justice) rather than to generalize to a broader population.

I used a broad view of social justice (those with a goal of addressing oppression and injustice) as selection criteria. I did not narrow the pursuit of social justice to a single definition, framework, or pedagogical approach, instead, I included any DSTEs that self-identified as having an interest in teaching social justice, equity, diversity, and/or inclusion. To ensure that these DSTEs had experiences teaching teachers, I limited the participants to DSTEs who were instructors of record for the Fall 2024 semester. In sum, the selection criteria for the study were: 1) doctoral student in the education school 2) self-proclaimed interest in social justice 3) instructor of record for an education related course - Fall 2024.

To develop a rich description of the phenomenon I chose a small sample of 4 DSTEs (Merriam, 1998). This small sample allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon – but also was large enough to compare the experiences of the DSTEs. To recruit the DSTEs, I reached out a program coordinator at the university to get a list of all current DSTEs and their assigned graduate assistantship roles for the upcoming semester. I then sent out an email (see

Appendix E) to all current doctoral students that had at least one year experience in a DSTE role (such as teaching assistant, university supervisor, or course instructor). In this email, I described the purpose of the research study, the compensation provided (\$200), and the details of what was required of them. I attached the consent form and had them signed prior to beginning data collection. After sending this initial recruitment email, I had two participants signed up for the study. To recruit more participants, I also asked faculty and doctoral students for recommendations for who might be interested in the study who also met the criteria for participation in the study. I ensured that I did not know the participants. I gathered participant information through the survey and put the participant answers directly into the table below (Table 9.).

Table 9. Participant information collected from survey data

Participant*	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity (Self-reported)	K-12 Teaching Experience	K-12 Teaching Location	K-12 Education Subject
Carl	35	Cisgender Male	White/European American	11 years	Large Mid-Atlantic city	Pre-K, 1 st Grade, 3 rd Grade
Molly	38	Female	White-presenting mixed/Mixed	10 years	Northeast and Mid-Atlantic	Film/Theater, ELA, Art
Sara	50	Female	Latina/Peruvian	22 years	Large Mid-Atlantic city	ESOL, Science, Bilingual Elementary
Maria	30	Female	Hispanic and Latina/Mexican American	5 years	Large Northeast city and Large Southwest city	1st grade and Spanish-English Bilingual Kindergarten

*Note: All participant names are pseudonyms

Carl

Carl grew up in a rural area in the Northeast. His family moved through different shades of poverty, and he remembers the uneasy familiarity of food insecurity and the weight of economic stress that shaped his childhood. School was never a refuge. As a queer kid, Carl

learned quickly the importance of representation. He never saw a teacher who reflected who he was or could show him that queerness and belonging could coexist in the same classroom. That absence later shaped his determination to be the adult who could make school feel human for someone else.

After two years at a community college, Carl transferred to a small private university, where studying sociology helped him name the inequities he had felt during childhood. An alternative teacher education certification program became his entry point into education, a crash course in teaching. He spent the next nine years teaching elementary school in a large East Coast city, where he prioritized teaching with joy, warmth, and a belief that every child deserved to feel seen. Eventually, his questions about how justice and care intersected in education drew him into doctoral study where he felt he could focus on talking injustice in new ways.

He has served as the instructor of record for three courses (pseudonyms):

- **TEACH 100 – Children’s Literature and Critical Literacy**
- **TEACH 200 – Introduction to Education**
- **TEACH 300 – Social Identity and Race**

He had also previously served as a TA for TEACH 100 twice before becoming the instructor of record in Fall 2024.

Molly

Molly grew up in a vibrant neighborhood in the liberal Northeast, where different languages and cultures blended into the soundscape of her childhood. Her mixed-race, bilingual family shaped her earliest understandings of identity and belonging. She stayed close to home for college, attending a local university with a large international student population. It was there that Molly began to see how language could open or close doors, not just for English learners but

for anyone trying to find their voice. After graduation, she headed south to work in the film industry, drawn by a love of storytelling and creative collaboration. Yet she found herself working in a school mentoring students in stage production and realizing that what she loved most wasn't production, but teaching.

That realization brought her fully into the classroom. She began teaching English and soon pursued a master's degree in Secondary English Language Arts at a state university in the Southeast. Teaching became the throughline that tied her creative and cultural experiences together.

As a DSTE, she has been the instructor of record for four courses:

- **TEACH 100** – Literature for Adolescents
- **TEACH 400** – Culturally Responsive Language and Literacy Instruction in Diverse Elementary Classrooms
- **TEACH 500** – Master's Seminar
- **TEACH 600**- Research Methodologies and Educational Practice

Sara

Sara's story begins in a South American city, where the pulse of political activism was part of everyday life. Her parents met through youth movements with her mother involved in church-based community organizing, and her father through Marxist circles. Their home was a place of constant discussion and conviction, where justice was not an abstract idea but a way of seeing the world. Growing up at the edge of the working and middle classes, Sara learned early how economic and social boundaries shaped opportunity.

When she moved to the United States at fifteen, that understanding deepened in painful ways. Suddenly, she was the outsider, the quiet girl who didn't quite fit the rhythm of American

high school. Loneliness and homesickness settled in, and the experience of displacement left a lasting mark. After completing her undergraduate degree at a liberal arts college in the Northeast, Sara earned a master's at a Mid-Atlantic university and began teaching high school ESOL in a nearby county. For nine years she built bridges for multilingual students, determined to create the kind of classroom that could have saved her younger self. Her work later expanded into nonprofit professional development, and then into a bilingual charter school, where she taught, coached, and mentored teachers for over a decade. Eventually, her commitment to language justice and educational equity drew her back to the university as a doctoral student where she continues to work towards linguistic justice.

As a DTSE she has been the instructor of record for both graduate and undergraduate courses, including:

- **TEACH 600:** Teaching for Equity in Bilingual/Language Immersion Programs (MA/EdD level)
- **TEACH 400:** Foundations of Literacy and Biliteracy Development (Undergraduate level, 2024)

Maria

Maria's story begins at the border, both literally and figuratively. Born in the United States but raised in Mexico, she grew up moving between two languages, two cultures, and two visions of belonging. Her early years were spent surrounded by family and community in Mexico, where home felt rooted and familiar. When her family later returned to the U.S., that sense of belonging was abruptly disrupted by the boundaries of language. In an English-only classroom, she learned what it meant to have part of herself silenced. The experience left her determined to ensure that language would never again be used to exclude or diminish.

Maria earned her undergraduate degree from a large state university near the border, a place where she could still feel connected to both sides of her identity. She began her career teaching in a structured English immersion program, striving to meet her students where they were while questioning the very system that constrained their voices. Later, she moved north to pursue a master's degree at a private Catholic university in the Northeast, a shift that expanded her perspective on bilingual education and equity. Returning to the classroom, she found her home in dual-language instruction, where her students' languages and identities were not deficits to correct but gifts to nurture.

Maria is currently at a state university in the Mid-Atlantic pursuing her PhD to become a professor and continue her pursuit of linguistic justice in education. While she has worked as a teaching assistant before, this was her first time teaching a course as the instructor of record.

Data Sources

To answer my research questions, I collected data from a variety of sources: survey, interviews, observations, and course artifacts (see Table 10.). The data collection occurred in six phases: (1) an initial Survey to gather background information, demographic information, and conceptions of social justice (Appendix G); (2) an initial focus group interview with all four DSTE participants focusing on DSTEs' backgrounds and conceptions of social justice (see interview questions in Appendix H); (3) a second interview focusing on each DSTE's process of developing conceptions of social justice (Appendix I); (4) collection of course artifacts: 4 lesson plans, 1 syllabus, and 4 other course materials related to DSTE teaching practices (such as assessments, PowerPoints, discussion post questions) for teacher education courses taught by each of the 4 focal DSTEs; (5) two observations of each DTSE which I conducted in person and took field notes (Appendix J); (6) a third interview focusing on the practices each DSTE used

when teaching teachers and how those practices related to their social justice conceptions (Appendix K). I collected the data over the course of 5 months (Table 11.). In the following section, I describe my data collection methods and provide an explanation for why each method appropriately addresses my research questions.

Table 10. Data sources

	Survey	Interview	Observation	Artifacts
Carl	1	3	2	1 syllabus, 4 course artifacts
Molly	1	3	2	1 syllabus, 4 course artifacts
Sara	1	3	2	1 syllabus, 4 course artifacts
Maria				
Total	4 Surveys	12 interviews	6 observations	3 syllabi, 12 course artifacts

Table 11. Data collection timeframe

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Initial Survey						
Interview 1						
Interview 2						
Artifact Collection						
Observations						
Interview 3 (via Zoom)						
Member Checking						

Survey. First, I conducted a survey (Appendix G) to gather information about the backgrounds of participants. The survey focused on the demographic information for the participants – such as their life experiences, educational experiences, teacher education, doctoral program experiences, and DSTE placements. There were also questions about their conceptions of social justice, such as diversity, inclusion, equity, oppression, and power. The answers to these questions were used during the subsequent interviews as talking points to tease out participants' conceptions of social justice. The survey was sent to participants after they completed the consent form for the study. After participants completed the survey, I sent them an email containing information about the research questions of the study, the goals of the study, and scheduling information about the interviews.

Interviews. Interviews were the primary method that I used to understand DSTE's conceptions of social justice. Interviews provide insight into the participant's lived experience and offer details about "... those things we cannot directly observe" (Patton, 2015, p. 426). For this study, I focused on DSTE's conceptions of social justice, the experiences that led to those conceptions, and how, if at all, DSTE's conceptions of social justice impacted their teaching of teachers. The interviews were semi-structured – using a set of guiding questions (see Appendixes H, I, and J) as well as asking flexible impromptu questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) state that 'good' interview questions are those "that are open-ended and yield descriptive data, even stories about the phenomenon" (p. 120). To ensure these types of questions, I avoided leading, multiple choice, and yes-no questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, I aimed to be a good listener, providing participants with time to answer and eliciting further elaboration when necessary (Yin, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I recorded each interview on my computer and phone. I later transcribed them using OtterAI transcription software. I began each interview by describing: (1) my motive, intentions, and purpose for the study, (2) how I would protect the participant through pseudonyms, (3) how the participant had the final say on what is presented in the research, (4) how they would be compensated for their contribution to the study, and (5) the logistics process for the subsequent interview(s) (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The interviews were recorded via my computer and phone and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. One interview was done in person at the College of Education in Maryland. The other two interviews were done via Zoom video conferencing software. I took notes during the interviews and subsequently transcribed the interviews using the recordings. As I interviewed participants, I worked to be aware of the power differences that can occur from visible social identities (Seidman, 2013), particularly given my visible identities as a White male. As I am also a DSTE, that did help to address these power differences, but I needed to critically reflect to ensure I was not overly controlling the direction of the interview nor imposing my perspectives on the participants' answers. The first interview (Appendix H) focused on developing an understanding of each participant's background and their conceptions of social justice. As I stated in the theoretical framework, social justice is both a goal and a process (Bell, 1997). Therefore, when analyzing conceptions of social justice, I focused on DSTEs' verbalized conceptions and indicators (as described in the theoretical framework) that show where their conceptions fall within Gorski's (2009) typology. My questions sought to elicit responses that would provide indicators to their conceptions of social justice, I asked DSTEs about their frameworks for thinking about social justice – the theoretical and philosophical influences of their conceptions of social justice. I drew on DSTEs' answers to the survey to begin the discussion of their conceptions of social justice. I structured the interview as a focus

group interview because “focus groups capitalize on group interaction to generate data, producing insights that might be less accessible in individual interviews” (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). I had the participants begin by sharing a drawing or photo of what social justice means to them. From there, I asked participants more specific questions about what social justice means to them.

The second interview (Appendix I) focused on how DSTEes develop their conceptions of social justice. The interview was conducted within two to three weeks of the first interview, so that there was enough time to analyze the first interview and documents while keeping those findings fresh in my mind. DSTEes are newcomers to a community, bringing with them their own meanings of what social justice is and how it applies to teacher education. As newcomers, DSTEes will shift the practices of the community through novel ideas and suggestions. Therefore, it is important to understand that DSTEes’ personal histories and life experiences before entering the teacher education program as a doctoral student are also important for understanding how their conceptions of social justice developed. I made sure to ask about those pre-doctoral experiences during this second interview. DSTEes’ social participation in their doctoral program was also important for understanding what experiences led to their development of conceptions of social justice. Wenger (1998) argued that communities of practice are “*shared histories of learning.*” (p. 86) These shared histories of learning evolved over time through social experiences of participation that “extend, redirect, dismiss, reinterpret, modify, or confirm [past meanings] ...” (p. 52). DSTEes’ conceptions of social justice (meanings) are developed through social experiences. The purpose of this interview was to discover what those social experiences were (during their doctoral program and prior to the doctoral program) and how those experiences had an impact on DSTEes’ conceptions of social justice.

The third interview (Appendix J) focused on how DSTEs apply their conceptions of social justice when teaching teachers and what practices they use. The interview was conducted within one month of the second interview to allow time to analyze the second interview, the documents (lesson plans and syllabi) provided by the participants as well as perform and analyze the observations. Through the interview, I aimed to understand how, if at all, DSTEs' conceptions of social justice were enacted in their classroom practices, lesson plans, and syllabi. I also discussed the institutional conditions surrounding their work as DSTEs. I asked about instances where their conceptions were constrained, reshaped, or diluted in practice.

Observations. I performed two in-person observations of DSTEs teaching and took field notes on my computer. The goal of these observations was to gather “detailed information that may not be divulged during conversations” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 117). The observations were of a lesson of the participants' choosing. As I observed the DSTEs teaching, I made detailed notes of the practices that they were using as well as the content being taught. I used an observation protocol when making notes (Appendix J). These observations provided evidence of how, if at all, DSTEs' conceptions of social justice were enacting in their teaching practices when teaching teachers.

Course Artifacts. I collected 1 syllabus and 4 course artifacts (self-selected by the participant) from the course I observed for each DSTE. The course artifacts included items that represent the DSTE's teaching practices. These artifacts included key assignments that they gave students, course readings, and course PowerPoints. I had participants email documents to me and I stored them on a password protected server. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue that personal documents are a “good source of data concerning a person's attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world.” (p.

166) Therefore, these documents were a useful representation of DSTE's conceptions of social justice and the ways in which they enact them in their practice.

Data Analysis

For this study, I performed data analysis as I collected data (over 3 months) and an additional 1-2 months after data collection was complete. This analysis began with writing analytical memos that were my reflections on the codes, themes, and patterns that were emerging from the data (Saldaña, 2015). These analytical memos acted as a researcher journal - a place to reflect on the data and the study. The goal of these analytical memos was "...not to summarize the data, but to reflect and expound on them." (Saldaña, 2015, p. 45) Data and memos were stored and coded using Dedoose software. I used a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2009) that allows for detailed descriptions of each DSTE case through within-case analysis followed by thematic analysis across the DSTE cases (Yin, 1999). Analysis within each case helped to identify any relationships that there may be between DSTE's conceptions of social justice, experiences that led to their development, and their teaching practices for teachers. Analysis across cases helped identify whether there were similarities and/or differences between participants. In the following paragraphs, I explain the data analysis process in further detail.

For the first cycle of coding, I used in vivo coding to analyze the data for each research question. In vivo coding "prioritize(s) and honor(s) the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 106). Each code was a "word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 105). In vivo coding helped to uncover DSTE's unique phrases and understandings of their social justice conceptions and teaching practices. As I read through the data I coded "impacting nouns, action-oriented verbs, evocative vocabulary, clever or ironic phrases, similes, and metaphors" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 107). I used in vivo coding for each data

source prior to using deductive (research question 1) and process (research question 2 and 3) types of coding for each research question.

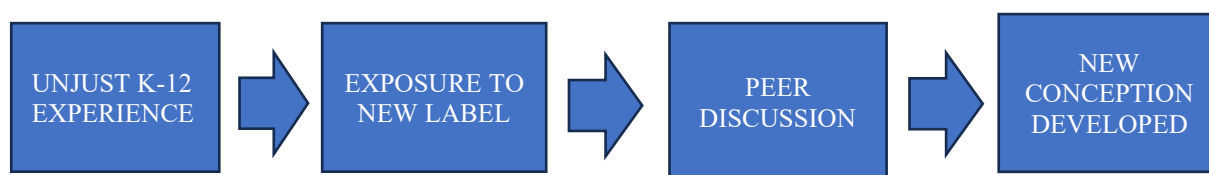
For research question 1, I used *in vivo* coding to gain an initial understanding of the data. I then used a deductive coding process utilizing Gorski's (2009) typology. I coded based on Gorski's five approaches to multicultural education (teaching the "other", teaching with cultural sensitivity and tolerance, teaching with multicultural competence, teaching in sociopolitical context, teaching as resistance counter-hegemonic practice) and differentiate between frameworks, goals, and processes. I also coded for conceptions and practices that did fit into one of Gorski's five approaches.

Saldaña (2015) suggests that using only *in vivo* coding can limit the researcher's perspective. Therefore, for research questions 2 and 3, I also used process coding to try and develop an understanding of the sequence of actions that lead DSTE's to adopt certain conceptions of social justice. Process coding uses gerunds ("-ing" words) to represent action in the data and is appropriate for my study as I searched "for the routines and rituals of human life" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 111). In this study, I focused on processes that DSTE's use to engage in social justice teaching and develop social justice conceptions. During coding, I searched for transitional words that denoted a participant's change in process, such as 'if' and 'then' (Saldaña, 2015). I then noted whether the process extended, redirected, dismissed, reinterpreted, modified, or confirmed the DSTE's meaning of social justice (Wenger, 1998).

I used flow diagrams (for an example, see Figure 1) to analyze data sources such as interviews, as a part of the analysis process (Saldaña, 2015) to understand the sequence of development that in which the DSTE's were engaged. For example, DSTE's may have experienced an event in their K-12 teaching that they recognized as unjust but did not have a

label for that experience until they read about that conception of social justice in a research article. They might not have adopted that conception for themselves until they had discussed it with peers and taught it to teachers. Here, the flow diagram analysis process (Saldaña, 2015) helped me to recognize the sequence of experiences that led to the development of one participant's specific conception of social justice.

Figure 1. Flow diagram example



For research question 3, I used process coding to analyze DSTE's teaching practices. When coding observations, class artifacts, and syllabi I used process coding to identify the different practices that the DSTE's were using. When coding the interviews, I used both in vivo and process coding to identify which practices DSTE's were using when teaching teachers, but also how those practices connected to their social justice conceptions. Furthermore, I examined instances in which DSTE's stated conceptions of social justice were constrained, reshaped, or diluted in practice.

Before engaging in a second round of coding, I used multiple iterations of code charting as it "enables the analyst to scan and construct patterns from the codes, to develop initial assertions or propositions" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 229).

These initial assertions and propositions helped with making meaning out of the data. These codes and summaries were changed and refined as I returned to the data after initial coding. This process helped me as I moved from coding to more conceptual analysis of the data during the second cycle of coding.

Table 12. Example of collapsing codes

Initial Codes	Collapsed Code	Second Round Coding
-develop their critical consciousness -think deeply and critically -critical reflective skills	Critical Consciousness Development	This code highlight how DSTE's aim to cultivate critical reflection and awareness among future teachers

The goal of the second round of coding was “reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through first cycle methods” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 234). For each research question I organized the initial codes and collapsed them to develop a smaller number of codes. I used pattern coding for this process, which is “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 236). For the first research question (How do four DSTE's describe their conceptions of social justice?), I pattern coded the initial codes that shed light on DSTE's' conceptions of social justice. I collected similarly coded passages from the data for each individual participant and after examining them for commonalities, I developed a statement that “describes a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data.” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 238). I compared these pattern codes to Gorski's (2009) framework to determine whether their conceptions of social justice align with one or more of his five approaches to social justice. I then compared patterns across participants to examine if there were any shared conceptions of social justice.

For the second research question (How did four DSTE's develop their conceptions of social justice?), I used pattern coding. As I collapsed similarly coded passages, I attempted to describe how DSTE's develop their conceptions of social justice through “...a pattern of

action...” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 238). I coded each individual participant first to determine the processes for development for their conceptions. I examined how codes were related to one another within case and the relationships that appeared to be developing across cases between DSTE’s processes and conceptions of social justice within each DSTE case. I then coded across participants to see if there are shared processes for development, or if the processes are more individual.

For the third research question: how, if at all, do four DSTE’s conceptions of social justice enact in their teaching practice when teaching teachers? I used pattern coding of the interviews, artifacts, and observations to describe the different practices that DSTE’s use to teach for social justice. I pattern coded for each individual participant first, to determine whether there is a relationship between their conceptions of social justice and their teaching practices. I then pattern coded across participants to determine if there were any shared teaching practices that DSTE’s have adopted. I also made note of instances in which DSTE’s stated conceptions of social justice were constrained, reshaped, or diluted in practice. After the data analysis was complete, I sent summaries of my findings to participants for member checks via email and we discussed if they were an accurate representation of their experiences.

The strategies outlined above were designed not only to generate rich and detailed case descriptions but also to support a trustworthy interpretation of findings. In the next section, I outline the steps I took to ensure the reliability, validity, and ethical integrity of this study.

Table 13. Data analysis summary

Research Questions	Data Sources	Analytical Memos		
		First Round Coding	Second Round Coding	Answering Research Questions

How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?	Interview 1 Survey	-In vivo (first) -deductive using Gorski's (2009) typology (second)	pattern	Examination of relationships between themes both within- case and cross-case
What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?	Interview 2	-in vivo (first) -process (second)	pattern	Examination of relationships between themes both within- case and cross-case
How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching?	Interview 3 Observations Course Artifacts	-in vivo (first) -process (second)	pattern	Examination of relationships between themes both within-case and cross-case

Reliability, Validity, and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the quality of the research study, I endeavored to address internal validity, external validity, construct validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). For internal validity, I used member checking, and addressed alternative explanations. Member checks are the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do...” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126) To do the member checks, I emailed the participants a summary of the findings I had about them and any specific questions I had about them. Furthermore, I got close to the phenomenon to “look for data that support alternative explanations” (Patton, 2015, p. 653). For external validity, I used a thick description of the context and participants of the study to help with generalizability. For construct validity, I used multiple sources of evidence, established chains of evidence, and performed member checks, (Yin, 2018). For reliability, I collected and stored all my data in Dedoose and used my interview protocols.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue that “validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator.” (p. 260). To conduct an ethical study, the researcher needs to not just obtain permission to conduct the study from an institution but should consider all potential

ethical issues in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I used a modified version of Patton's (2015) checklist for ethics to guide my study:

1. Explaining the purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used – during each phase of interaction with participants, I explained what was happening and what the purpose was.
2. Reciprocity – \$200 via Venmo or Zelle.
3. Confidentiality - I used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.
4. Informed consent – I got consent from the participants prior to starting the study. The participants were also reminded throughout the study that they do not have to answer the questions and could end their participation at any point.
5. Data access and ownership - All data was stored in a password protected account – GoogleDrive. I used password protected Dedoose (coding software) to store and work on data. Member checking was done through a password protected email account.
6. Data collection boundaries – I did not collect any data outside of the scope of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Research Question 1: Doctoral Student Teacher Educator Conceptions of Social Justice

In this study, I explored how DSTEs conceptualize social justice in teacher education:

Research Question 1: How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?

In this section, I present each DSTE as a case, drawing on within-case analysis (Yin, 1999) to provide a holistic understanding of their conceptions of social justice. I adopted inductive and deductive analysis of the four DSTEs using focus group interview and survey data. During deductive analysis, I utilized Gorski's (2009) typology (as described in chapter 2 and presented

again below) to categorize the DSTE's' social justice conceptions. Inductively, I used in vivo coding of participants' conceptions of social justice.

Table 14. Conceptions of social justice based upon Gorski (2009)

Conceptions of Social Justice			
Approaches	Frameworks (Theories/Philosophical Foundations)	Goals	Indicators
Teaching the 'Other' (Conservative)	Group-specific studies; cross-cultural communication; "contributions" approach	Prepare teachers to work with diverse student populations by learning surface-level traits, customs, and contributions of nondominant groups—often with the aim of assimilation into dominant norms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Othering language (e.g., describing groups as "different" or "outside the norm"). • Homogenizing nondominant groups (generalizations without internal diversity). • Surface-level cultural references (holidays, food, clothing). • Assimilation framing (students adapting to dominant norms). • Market-based rationale for diversity (global competitiveness).
Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance (Liberal)	Human relations; intergroup relations; tolerance education; cultural sensitivity; celebrating diversity; pluralism	Prepare teachers to enter classrooms with interpersonal awareness and tolerance for diversity, often through self-reflection on biases, without explicit engagement with systemic inequities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration of diversity without critique (respect, appreciation, celebration as endpoints). • Emphasis on bias self-reflection as main growth area. • Relationship-centered framing (interpersonal harmony as solution). • Avoidance of systemic inequities in language. • Metaphors of harmony ("getting along," "building bridges").
Teaching with Multicultural Competence (Liberal)	Multicultural competence; culturally relevant pedagogy; culturally responsive teaching; differentiated instruction for diverse learners	Equip teachers with strategies and practical skills to implement inclusive curricular and pedagogical practices that engage diverse students—framed as classroom effectiveness rather than structural transformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill/strategy orientation (focus on teaching tools). • Culturally responsive teaching framed as technique, not political stance. • Effectiveness framing (engagement, classroom management, achievement). • Limited or no link between competence and systemic change. • Use of competence-oriented language (toolkits, best practices).
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (Critical)	Critical consciousness; intersectional analysis; critical theories; critical pedagogy	Engage teachers in systemic analysis of how power, oppression, and inequity shape schooling; connect classroom practice to broader sociopolitical and historical contexts,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic framing of inequities (institutional, not just individual). • Linking school inequities to societal/historical issues. • Use of critical theories (CRT, feminism, queer theory) as analysis tools.

		developing awareness to inform teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanizing pedagogy (dignity, relational care, awareness). • Power/oppression vocabulary (privilege, systemic barriers). • Emphasis on developing critical consciousness (awareness before action).
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice (Critical)	Praxis; transformative pedagogies; humanizing pedagogy; counter-hegemonic pedagogy; educational activism	Prepare teachers as change agents committed to resisting dominant ideologies and oppressive practices; apply critical consciousness through praxis; use humanizing and counter-hegemonic pedagogies to enact social reconstruction and transformation in education and beyond.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching framed as political or activist work. • Praxis language (reflection-action cycles aimed at transformation). • Humanizing pedagogy (mutual transformation). • Counter-hegemonic stance (disrupting dominant narratives). • Education framed as a tool for social reconstruction beyond classrooms.

Each DSTE incorporated elements of the critical conception of social justice: teaching in sociopolitical context when describing their conceptions of social justice (Gorski, 2009). Gorski (2009) breaks Teaching in Sociopolitical Context into three areas: 1) critical analysis at systemic level, 2) consideration of the larger sociopolitical context, and 3) engagement of critical theories (see Table 14).

Sara and Carl described their conceptions of social justice as Teaching as Resistance Counter-Hegemonic Practice. This conception builds on the sociopolitical context framework by focusing on: (1) commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony, (2) application of critical consciousness, and (3) social reconstruction as an explicit goal (Gorski, 2009). Sara and Carl demonstrated all three of these areas. Table 15. summarizes the participants' conceptions of social justice. I will discuss them in further detail in this section.

Table 15. Participants and Gorski's (2009) critical conceptions of social justice

	Participants			
	Carl	Molly	Sara	Maria
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context				
Critical analysis at systemic level	X	X	X	X

Consideration of larger sociopolitical context	X		X	
Engagement of critical theories	X	X	X	X
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice				
Commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony	X		X	X
Application of critical consciousness	X		X	
Social Reconstruction as an explicit goal	X		X	

Note: X shows that the participant displayed that conception

After discussing each case separately, I present the themes that emerged during cross-case analysis (Creswell et al., 2007):

Theme 1: All the DSTE's described social justice as involving critical analysis and humanizing pedagogy.

Theme 2: Sara and Carl also emphasized the *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemony* by expressing the need for educators and students to resist oppression.

In this section, I discuss each participant's conceptions of social justice before discussing these themes.

Carl

Carl exhibited critical conceptions of social justice that included Gorski's (2009): (1) critical analysis at systemic level, (2) consideration of larger sociopolitical context, (3) engagement of critical theories, and (4) prepare teachers and students to resist oppression. Carl emphasized the need for teachers to expand their view of social justice so that they recognize the institutional role in oppression and develop the connection between broader societal injustices and those injustices seen in schools. His hope was that teachers could use these understandings to advocate for their students who are experiencing oppression. Furthermore, Carl noted the importance of humanizing pedagogy and the pursuit of joy in education. In the following section, I provide evidence of Carl's conceptions of social justice.

Critical Analysis at Systemic Level: During his focus group interview, Carl stated that he wanted to “help (teachers) to reframe their thinking so that they can start to approach issues of justice more systematically, institutionally, and structurally rather than just individually” (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Carl wanted to help the teachers in his class to not just see injustice as one person oppressing another but recognize the role of institutions in creating oppression. He wanted his teachers to develop the “means to see injustice and to question it in our interactions, in our work, and how you move in the world (a la Freire)” (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24). Carl’s goals for his teachers display a connection between social justice and the need to recognize institutional oppression.

Carl also described institutional oppression when discussing his experiences with his current institution. He viewed teaching social justice as hypocritical because of the institution’s failure to meet his basic needs with their stipend amount:

And if you want me to enact a humanizing, social justice-oriented pedagogy, and you want me to facilitate these conversations with undergraduate students, I cannot be thinking about where am I going to buy food? And I cannot be skipping meals because I don't want to spend more than \$5 a day, be like trying to eat. So just those like basic institutional level humanizing practices that the college is not doing makes it harder for me (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl highlighted how institutional policies in teacher education can be dehumanizing, reinforcing the need for systemic critique.

Consideration of Larger Sociopolitical Context: Carl, in a survey question on the goals for his teachers, mentioned that he wanted his teachers to:

understand that there are mechanisms of inequality that exist ‘outside of school’ which are actually incredibly consequential to the way U.S. society designs schools, runs schools, and allocates resources to schools” (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24)

Carl’s conceptions of social justice involve recognizing that inequalities in schools exist outside of the classroom in broader society. This conception connects with Anyon’s (1980) ideas around

educational inequities in schools being a mirror of those in society – for example, racism in society is mirrored with racist practices and policies in schools.

Engagement of Critical Theories: Carl connected social justice with Freire’s (1970) concepts of humanizing pedagogy and critical consciousness. In the survey, Carl stated that he tries to create a “humanizing space where teachers feel seen and appreciated” (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24). Carl attempted to create this humanizing space when preparing teachers by creating a community where teachers saw each other as people and as friends (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Carl wanted teachers in his classroom to feel safe and brave but also create spaces where their students could feel the same (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24). Humanizing pedagogy was a guiding principle for how Carl wanted to enact social justice with teachers.

Carl also stressed humanizing pedagogy when discussing his K-12 classroom experiences. When asked what photo represents social justice to him, he chose a photo of his elementary students in his prior classroom. In the photo, you see the students smiling while they are playing cards during a break from high stakes testing. Carl stated that he chose this photo because it represented joy to him. Joy was an important part of social justice for Carl because it is a humanizing experience that is absent from much of the current approach to schooling:

And the focus on taking moments to yourself for joy or even taking moments to yourself for rest and relaxation is just as important as, like, what you can academically produce. So it just reminds me of, like, the hope that should be and can be part of like social justice education (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24).

Carl argues for joy and hope as counters to the dehumanizing aspects of education:

Over the last past year, I’ve been trying to think about what is the role of joy in justice oriented movements, and how can we think about the constant need for humanity and joy when we continue to exist in very dehumanizing contexts? (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Here Carl describes his reflections on how he tried to rehumanize the educational experience with joy and humanity to help counter dehumanizing contexts. This questioning around social justice also represents his critical consciousness – an attribute that he sees as central to education.

For Carl, fostering critical consciousness was central to effective teaching. He stated that his goal was to help teachers develop their awareness, seeing it as essential to their role (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24). Critical consciousness is Freire’s (1970) concept on how people need to develop a deep understanding of systemic oppression so that they can collectively act to overcome it. Carl’s goal was for teachers to take this lens to identify and understand oppression in their future classrooms.

Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice: Carl displayed evidence that his conceptions of social justice align with the three characteristics of Gorki’s (2009) *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice*: (1) commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony, (2) application of critical consciousness, and (3) social reconstruction as an explicit goal. First, Carl identified as a critical and postmodern researcher who problematizes the current education system:

I describe myself as a critical and postmodern researcher, I enjoy teaching and studying from a perspective that problematizes objectivity and meritocracy, interrogates how power shapes knowledge production and dissemination, critiques how inequality enacts itself through oppressive social systems, and ultimately works to compel people to create actionable change by transforming social systems to be more equity-oriented and liberatory (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24)

In his survey response, Carl highlights a key approach of teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice – a teacher as an advocate for change and resister to oppression. He used the terms: “actionable change,” “transforming,” and “liberatory” (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24) to discuss teachers’ role in education. His goal was to transform oppressive systems rather than just the

individual teacher. Here he displays his commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony (Gorski, 2009)

Carl, during his time as a teacher, modelled the process of critical consciousness and praxis to alter an unjust school ranking system. Praxis is the ongoing, cyclical process of reflection and action aimed at transforming the world. Carl used praxis during his time as a member of an advocacy group: “I was part of a teacher advocacy group called Empower Ed, which brought teachers from across a large metropolitan city on the east coast. to work on a campaign related to some kind of educational equity issue that we felt was important to address” (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24). Carl worked to transform an inequitable school rating system because it disproportionately valued test scores over a holistic view of student achievement. He organized a campaign where he met with community members getting their perspective and lobbied members of a local city council to replace the system. He met with members of the school board of education, testified at board meetings, and advocated for removal of the rating system. He and his advocacy team were successful in altering the school ranking system. These actions show that Carl moved beyond just verbalism (identifying oppression) and towards action and transformation.

Carl also demonstrates his connection between social justice and the concept of resistance through his work to develop teachers’ commitment to resistance. Carl wanted teachers to “learn to advocate for themselves and their students” (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24) He also wanted his teachers to see themselves not just as teachers, but also as activists and community organizers (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24) He laid out how he hoped that the preservice teachers in his courses would be able to do this:

critical consciousness and organizing skills necessary to build solidarity with students and families in a way that allows them to leverage their collective power to advocate for

policy changes that are making my grand idea of school transformation possible. I believe that teaching is an inherently political act and I want teachers to see how their role is part of a growing activist or organizing (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24)

Here Carl highlights two key points for social justice teaching: 1) the need for teachers to build solidarity with students and families to leverage collective power 2) the need for teachers to view themselves as activists and teachers rather than only as teachers. Carl's conceptions of social justice align with Gorski's (2009) *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice*: (1) commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony, (2) application of critical consciousness, and (3) social reconstruction as an explicit goal.

Molly

Molly's conceptions of social justice included Gorski's (2009) critical analysis of institutions and engaging in critical theories but did not specifically address the need for advocacy and resistance (Gorski, 2009). Molly stressed the institutional injustices that she faced as well as the negative impact of Whiteness on schooling. Molly described using humanizing pedagogy in her classrooms but did not name specific scholars or frameworks. She did try to improve her own institution's social justice approach by developing a way to weave social justice conceptions through the teacher education program. However, she did not emphasize the need to resist oppression when pursuing social justice. In the following section, I describe Molly's conceptions of social justice.

Critical Analysis at Systemic Level: Molly criticized her teacher education program for its failure to develop teachers' conceptions of social justice. Despite stating a commitment to social justice, the teachers in her course were not taking social justice and equity focused classes until later in the program. "[Teachers] make it to like, year three or four without knowing some of this foundational stuff about equity is just wild" (Molly, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Molly

recognized that this lack of focus on social justice was a problem and along with two doctoral students worked to “institute a thread of culturally conscious and socially just education” (Molly, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24) into the teacher curriculum for the teacher education program to consider adopting. Despite their efforts to change the teacher education curriculum, the program did not consider their suggestions:

several years and just nothing came of it [suggestion for social justice integration]. And now that I and the other copresidents of that time are about to graduate, we’ve passed it on to the new leadership, so they have all our notes and stuff. But I don’t know if anything will ever come of it (Molly, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Molly described how institutions can persist with oppression despite people pushing for change. This lack of change might be that those members of the institution [College of Education] are not interested or motivated to change. Juárez et al. (2008) argued that some teacher educators use social justice to make White people feel comfortable with diversity rather than to promote critical teaching that seeks to address injustice. The authors describe this version of social justice as being about “...positively managing White people’s emotions and helping them to maintain an image of themselves as good and innocent” (p. 23). Therefore, the program that Molly was a part of might not have had an incentive or drive to change. The takeaway here is that Molly, through her critiques and actions to try and change the institution to be more social justice oriented, showed that her conceptions of social justice involve a critical analysis of the system. However, she did not detail how she was applying this approach in her teaching of teachers.

Engagement of Critical Theories: Molly engaged in critical theories through her encouragement of teachers to use humanizing methods when teaching students. Although she did not directly quote theorists or pedagogical frameworks in the interviews and surveys for this project, she did argue that teachers need “to learn to separate their thinking from learning goals and can do descriptors and start thinking about their students as whole people with skills and goals, then

work to help those students meet appropriate goals from them” (Molly, Survey). Here, Molly focused on the importance of viewing students as people rather than as a task. This conception of social justice contradicts the neoliberal approach to education that often focuses only on a student as a test score rather than as a person. For Molly, student focused education meant facilitating learning by getting out of the way of student learning (Molly, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24) Molly also focused on a similar goal in her role as a teacher educator where she wanted to focus her class time on “what my students think” (Molly, Survey, 10.1.24) rather than what she or the textbook thinks. Molly does not directly quote critical theories and frameworks, but she does emphasize approaches that mirror aspects of humanizing pedagogy. Molly’s adoption of critical theories was to guide her approach to teaching rather than theories that she was going to teach to her students.

Sara

Sara demonstrated a widespread understanding of social justice that included all conceptions of Gorski’s (2009) critical typology. Her conceptions of social justice included: (1) criticism of the institutional injustice of the teacher education program; (2) connection of social justice with broader societal problems; (3) liberation theory and the concepts of praxis, humanizing pedagogy, and critical consciousness; and (4) the need to resist oppression. In the following section, I provide evidence of Sara’s conceptions of social justice.

Critical Analysis at Systemic Level: Sara critiqued the unjust treatment of DSTEs in her institution. Sara argued that she was allocated insufficient time to mold her course to teach teachers social justice how she would have liked. The result was a struggle to maintain a balance between her doctoral studies and her role as a teacher educator. The lack of time allocated for

DSTEs to perform social justice work means that social justice teaching occurs at the expense of DSTEs' wellbeing:

this [social justice] is being done on the margins and on, on the backs of people's extra time in the summer, on the backs of Molly organizing the Graduate Student Association, on the backs of Maria and I talking on Sunday night to figure out how, why we don't like this chapter and what we need to change right? And so that's an equity issue (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24).

Sara argued that not allocating enough time for DSTEs to support social justice goals is an equity issue as DSTEs end up suffering by taking away time from the rest of their lives. She suggests that DSTEs are trying to teach in a context that was designed to be counter to the mission of social justice (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). She claimed that DSTEs were left to realize social justice teacher education alone and suggested the need to "have a co-planning meeting where we do curriculum mapping of social justice standards across the curriculum" (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). The lack of support for Sara led to burnout where she became "completely overwhelmed" (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Sara's critique of the teacher education program shows that she connects her conceptions of social justice with injustices beyond the personal and instead recognizes that injustices are engrained in institutional power.

Consideration of Larger Sociopolitical Context: Sara also connected the educational injustices she saw enacted by people and institutions as part of a larger societal problem. During the focus group interview, when asked to find a photo that represented what social justice meant to her, Sara described a photo she had of her and her middle school students at an immigration rights rally that she had hung up in her office:

the connection between Black history and immigration rights. And so the group of middle schoolers, it was like a lot, you know, Elijah, Renee, Salvador. It was like Black and Brown kids. And that image, I forget who gave me the picture, but somebody took a

picture and gave it to me, and I just had it in my office forever (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Sara connects immigration injustices to educational injustices, particularly for students of color. Her decision to incorporate immigration rights into the curriculum demonstrates her understanding that issues affecting students outside of school, such as immigration policies and racial injustices, have a direct impact on their educational experiences.

Engagement of Critical Theories: Sara engaged with critical theories when defining her social justice conceptions. She associated social justice with the concepts of humanizing, liberation, critical consciousness, and praxis (Freire, 1970). These conceptions align with Gorski's (2009) approach of teaching in sociopolitical context (Table 1.), where critical theories, such as liberatory education and critical multicultural education are used as frameworks.

Sara emphasized the need to build a relationship with teachers where she shares about herself and listens as they share their stories. Her goal was to create “connections with them [teachers] as people” (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). She saw this humanizing approach as an important aspect of social justice.

Freire (1970) encouraged people to develop critical consciousness – the ability to critically analyze the injustices of the world and act on those injustices to challenge and transform oppressive systems. Sara showed her focus on critical consciousness through her own critical reflections:

you have to constantly reframe and be kind of antiracist, critical, constantly and checking yourself. Whatever privilege you have. Like as a Latina woman, I have certain things that have been history, long history with oppressive moments, and also a long history with privilege (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Here Sara is discussing her own reflective process and how she is constantly trying to be aware of her own privilege versus her own experiences with oppression. For Sara, “every single

conversation is an equity conversation” (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24) She is constantly aware of the injustices and is working towards liberation from them. Sara wanted her teachers to have the same awareness:

develop my students’ (future teachers) knowledge and ideological commitment so they are able to reflect on and enact high-quality equity-focused bilingual education for their emergent bilingual students, especially those with historical marginalized identities. To me it is both ideology and praxis (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Sara’s teaching reflects Freire’s (1970) concept of *praxis*, a key component of critical consciousness that involves both critical reflection and transformative action. Rather than treating social justice as abstract theory, Sara encouraged her students to interrogate structural inequities in their own teaching contexts and to develop pedagogical strategies that challenge those inequities. This integration of reflection and action aligns her conceptions of social justice closely with critical theory, which emphasizes the examination and disruption of power structures in education and society.

Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice: Sara’s conceptions of social justice align with Gorski’s (2009) *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice*: (1) commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony, (2) application of critical consciousness, and (3) social reconstruction as an explicit goal. First, Sara, as a teacher, worked to help her K-12 students to resist the oppression that they faced in school. She aimed to give students “tools that they need to acquire and have access to in order to shape their destinies” (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). She developed a unit where her middle school students attended a demonstration for immigrant rights. By teaching her students about rights and protesting, she was providing them with an example of how you might act (resist) injustice (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). During a member check, she emphasized that she has been involved with “advocacy and created spaces in her classroom for that (i.e. writing opinions with my students

about the Dream Act, writing letters to city officials to advocate for more green spaces, etc.)” (Sara, Personal Communication, June 9, 2025) Sara’s support of advocacy and public protest shows a commitment to Gorski’s characteristic of commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony.

Sara, when discussing social justice, connected it with the concepts of liberation, resistance, and advocacy:

When I hear “social justice”, I think of liberatory perspectives that emphasize the empowerment of marginalized communities (and their allies), who use their collective power to advocate for rights, sovereignty, and humanity. It’s about recognizing and dismantling oppressive systems, creating equitable spaces, and ensuring everyone has access to resources, opportunities, and a voice in decisions (Sara, Survey, 10.1.24)

Here Sara highlights Gorski’s (2009) characteristics of social reconstruction as an explicit goal. Her mention of the dismantling of oppressive systems explicitly shows that she has social reconstruction as her goal for education. Furthermore, she saw disrupting inequities, creating liberation and working towards equity as central components to teaching (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24) As mentioned in the previous section on critical theories, Sara sees critical consciousness and praxis as an important mechanism for achieving this goal of social reconstruction.

Maria

Maria’s social justice conceptions include two of Gorski’s (2009) critical approaches: 1) critical analysis at the systemic level and 2) engagement in critical theories (Gorski, 2009). She connected social justice with institutional injustice – moving beyond the concept of injustice as an individual act. She also engaged with critical theories – she focused on asset-based pedagogy (Moll et al., 2012) and humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Unlike Carl and Sara, she did not

connect her conceptions of social justice to specific scholars, nor did she discuss liberation and advocacy in depth.

Critical Analysis at Systemic Level: Maria revealed her understanding of institutional injustice through her critique of her experience as a teacher. She saw the power that institutionalized oppression can have over students and teachers:

I think that [...] multilingual students [...] when they arrive to the United States and they see [...] White monolingual norms. It's really hard for them to connect to schools. And when [I was] the teacher myself, I was also being part of that, of that problem, right? I was also normalizing that English was the norm, and that I was expecting them to speak English to me, because under the laws in Arizona, I was unable to communicate with them in my home language, in Spanish. And so that was just really, really rough, and I couldn't take it anymore. (Maria, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Here Maria is describing her experiences as a teacher in Arizona under Proposition 203 that mandated English only language in schools. This mandate lasted from 2000 to 2019 and prevented many students from speaking in their home language while at schools – which for many in the state was Spanish. Despite Maria's ability to speak Spanish – she was not allowed to communicate with her students in Spanish. As a teacher in this system, she played a role in the oppression of her students' language and culture. She recognized the experience as formative in her decision to further her education and pursue ways to address oppression. When considering social justice, she could not disentangle it from her linguistic experiences as a teacher - "I cannot separate social justice from linguistic justice. I think it's they're ever much correlated" (Maria, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). For Maria, her experience with institutional injustices shaped her conceptions of social justice to focus on linguistic injustice.

Engagement of Critical Theories: Maria connected social justice with an asset-based approach to teaching that focuses on a student's funds of knowledge (Maria, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). A funds of knowledge approach to teaching involves recognizing that "students'

households contain ample social and intellectual resources that schools should acknowledge and incorporate into the learning process" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133) This asset-based approach to teaching derived from Maria's experience as a teacher in Arizona's dehumanizing schools. When asked to show a photo that represents social justice, Maria drew a picture of a flower that represented one of her former students. The oppression her student, Daisy, experienced led Maria to try and connect with her through gardening:

I'm thinking about one particular student. Her name was Daisy. She spoke Spanish, and like I said, I couldn't speak Spanish to her in the classroom. She would see me and hear me speak Spanish to her parents, and I think that was a big frustration, right? Because she knew I spoke the language she understood, but I wasn't able to communicate in that language in the classroom. And so her mom told me that she was very shy, but that she was, one of her interests was gardening, and so I came up with the idea of bringing some daisy seeds (Maria, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Maria used a humanizing asset-based approach to try and counter a "system that is constantly telling her [Daisy] that she is not enough because she doesn't have the language to communicate what she knows and what she brings to the table" (Maria, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24)

Maria recognized that the experience that she and Daisy faced in school was one that many multilingual students faced and continue to face. Maria's conceptions of social justice recognize the role that institutions play in perpetuating injustice and the need for critical pedagogies to counter those injustices. However, she was not explicit about the transformative nature of education and therefore her conceptions of social justice did not align with Gorski's (2009) *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice*.

Research Question 1: Cross-Case Analysis

Theme 1: Critical Analysis and Critical Pedagogies

Research Question 1: How do four DSTEs describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education? All four DSTEs exhibited conceptions of justice that align with

Gorski's (2009) *Teaching in Sociopolitical Context* approach to teaching. Each DSTE focused on critical analysis at the systemic level and engaged with critical theories.

Critical Analysis

Critical analysis at the systemic level involved being able to “differentiate between personal and institutional discrimination, as well as the forces which either promote or inhibit equity and cultural pluralism” (Gorski, 2009, p. 15). The DSTEs demonstrated this recognition in several ways (see Table 16.). First, they noted that teacher education programs themselves often perpetuate injustices. For instance, Sara noted social justice is “being done on the margins and on the backs of people’s extra time” (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Here Sara highlighted how the teacher education program is inhibiting equity by requiring those DSTEs focused on social justice to commit more time and energy to working towards their efforts of SJTE.

Second, the DSTEs recognized that K-12 students experienced institutional oppression, not just injustice via individuals. This distinction: that injustice happens when one individual oppresses another versus oppression happens through the oppressive structures of organizations is important in determining that a conception of social justice falls within Gorski's (2009) *Teaching in Sociopolitical Context* approach to teaching. For instance, Carl stated that he wanted to “help (teachers) to reframe their thinking so that they can start to approach issues of justice more systematically, institutionally, and structurally rather than just individually” (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Here Carl is highlighting the critical awareness that oppression happens more broadly than one individual being oppressive towards another.

These findings demonstrate that DSTEs' conceptions of social justice extend beyond inclusive curriculum or diverse representation (as in Gorski's (2009) liberal approaches). Instead,

they reflect a critical approach to disrupting systemic injustices through awareness of how injustice is structured within society.

Table 16. DSTE's critical analysis

	Critical Analysis
Carl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraged teachers to see systemic and institutional oppression, not just individual injustice. - Critiqued institutional hypocrisy, noting how DSTE's low stipends undermine social justice commitments. - Advocated for systemic critique of teacher education policies by teachers and teacher educators
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criticized delayed social justice education in the teacher preparation program. - Collaborated with peers to push for social justice curriculum integration but faced institutional resistance. - Identified how institutions maintain oppression despite reform efforts. - Recognized that social justice is often performative rather than transformational.
Sara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlighted inequitable working conditions for DSTE's trying to teach social justice. - Called for institutional support, such as co-planning and curriculum mapping. - Connected burnout and systemic barriers to the institutional failure to prioritize equity.
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critiqued linguistic oppression in schools, shaped by her experience under Arizona's English-only laws. - Recognized how monolingual norms marginalize multilingual students. - Reflected on her complicity in reinforcing linguistic injustice as a teacher. - Asserted that social justice and linguistic justice are inseparable.

Critical Pedagogies

DSTE's also engaged with critical theories – both as an approach to their teaching, and as analytical tools for understanding and challenging inequities. The primary focus for all four DSTE's was humanizing pedagogies - teaching approaches grounded in relationality, dignity, and recognition of students' full humanity (Freire, 1970). For instance, Carl stated that he tried to create a “humanizing space where teachers feel seen and appreciated” (Carl, Survey. 10.1.24). Humanizing pedagogy was a guiding principle for how Carl wanted to enact social justice with teachers. As summarized in Table 17., each DSTE enacted humanizing pedagogy in ways that reflected their social identities, teaching contexts, and learning communities.

Table 17. Summary of DSTE's humanizing pedagogies

	Humanizing Pedagogy
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Carl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drew on Freire's (1970) humanizing pedagogy and critical consciousness. - Created a supportive community with the aim of teachers and students feeling seen and valued. - Emphasized joy and hope as essential to countering dehumanizing schooling. - Encouraged critical awareness and action against systemic oppression.
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocated for student-centered learning, seeing students as whole people. - Encouraged stepping back to let students lead their own learning. - Prioritized students' voices over rigid curricula in teacher education.
Sara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Linked social justice to humanizing, liberation, critical consciousness, and praxis (Freire, 1970). - Built relationships with teachers through personal connection and storytelling. - Encouraged constant self-reflection on privilege and oppression. - Saw equity as central to every conversation and urged teachers to develop praxis.
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used an asset-based approach, valuing students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). - Countered dehumanizing school policies, especially for multilingual students. - Highlighted institutional barriers like Arizona's English-only laws. - Strove to build connections with students through their cultural backgrounds and interests.

This theme contributes to research question 1 by illustrating how DSTEs' conceptions of social justice are rooted in both critical analysis and humanizing pedagogy. It highlights that learning to teach for social justice requires both systemic critique and a humanizing orientation toward students and future teachers. Together, these insights reaffirm the importance of cultivating critical, participatory, and relational learning environments in social justice teacher education.

Theme 2: Social Justice Resistance: Advocacy and Anti-Hegemony Practice

Carl and Sara's conceptions of social justice emphasized Gorski's (2009) *Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice* versus Maria and Molly, who focused more on *Teaching as Sociopolitical Context* (see Table 18.). Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice (Gorski, 2009) builds on the sociopolitical context framework by focusing on action and emphasizing teachers' and students' roles in resisting oppression. This approach to teaching social justice involves DSTEs recognizing teachers as change agents, engaging in praxis, and recognizing the goal of education as transformation. Carl and Sara emphasized these elements in four different ways: 1) activism and resistance 2) community engagement and

collective power 3) systemic change and critique of oppression and 4) encouraging teacher activism.

Table 18. DSTEs and resistance conceptions

	Resistance
Carl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocated for teachers to see themselves as activists and community organizers. - Encouraged teachers to build solidarity with students and families to leverage collective power. - Engaged in direct advocacy by working to change an inequitable school ranking system in D.C. - Identified teaching as a political act and pushes for systemic transformation. - Critiqued institutional oppression and calls for actionable change.
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focused on critiquing institutions but does not emphasize direct advocacy or resistance. - Saw social justice as a systemic issue but does not frame teaching as a form of activism.
Sara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocated for liberatory perspectives and the empowerment of marginalized communities. - Emphasized social justice as resistance against oppression and systemic inequities. - Engaged students in activism, such as organizing demonstrations for immigrant rights. - Saw every conversation as an equity conversation, constantly reflecting on privilege and oppression. - Encourages teachers to develop praxis—critical reflection followed by action.
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocated for multilingual students by challenging linguistic oppression in schools. - Encouraged teachers to become lifelong advocates for multilingualism. - Highlighted the importance of advocacy but does not emphasize resistance against institutions.

Activism and Resistance: Sara and Carl described teaching as a political act that involves resisting systemic oppression. They suggested the need for teachers to become change agents. They differed slightly on their focus - Carl framed teaching as activism (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.7.24) whereas Sara focused more on teachers needing to develop their praxis (Sara, Focus Group Interview, 10.7.24). These nuances reflect different entry points into resistance-oriented teaching, but both emphasize the necessity of preparing future teachers to intervene in systems of inequity.

Community Engagement and Collective Power: Sara and Carl both advocated for building solidarity with marginalized communities. Carl focused on teachers as community organizers who worked with students and families to address injustices (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24), while Sara engaged students directly in activism through a demonstration on immigrant rights (Sara, Focus

Group Interview, 10.7.24) These enactments resonate with Freire's (1970) belief that education should emerge from learners' lived realities and promote collective empowerment.

Critique of Institutional Oppression – Both Sara and Carl critiqued the institutional oppression they experienced and called for action to address the injustices that they had witnessed. They both critiqued K-12 school and higher education settings. Carl challenged the ways that teacher education programs maintain White normative standards, while Sara reflected on how her own students faced exclusion based on race and immigration status. Sara and Carl's conceptions of social justice support Freire's (1970) vision of education as a liberatory practice where teaching can serve as a powerful tool for resistance, empowerment, and systemic change.

Encouraging Teacher Activism - Both DSTEs saw one of their core responsibilities as preparing teachers who will challenge injustice. Carl aimed to model a form of pedagogy that was unapologetically justice-driven, while Sara emphasized building students' critical consciousness as a foundation for future activism. These conceptions move beyond the surface level goals of inclusion and equity, instead pushing toward systemic transformation.

These findings show that Carl and Sara's conceptions of social justice extended beyond teaching in sociopolitical context (Gorski, 2009). Their views are grounded in activism, critical pedagogy, and institutional change, making them representative of Gorski's (2009) teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice approach.

Summary

In summary, the DSTEs in this study conceptualized social justice as systemic, action-oriented, and rooted in humanizing pedagogy. All four aligned with Gorski's (2009) teaching in sociopolitical context framework by emphasizing structural inequities, critical theory, and institutional critique. However, a point of divergence emerged around the role of resistance in

social justice. While Carl and Sara framed resistance, activism, and the preparation of teachers as change agents as central to social justice, Molly and Maria took a more relational and reflective approach. They focused on creating inclusive, affirming spaces and supporting individual identity development, but were less explicit about confronting systems through activism or encouraging direct resistance.

This variation matters for two reasons. First, it highlights that social justice teacher education is not monolithic, even amongst those who are critically oriented, there are different pathways and pedagogical commitments. Second, the divergence around resistance raises critical questions about the conditions that enable or discourage activism within teacher education and how teacher educators develop their resistance focused conceptions of social justice.

Table 19. Summary of participants' conceptions of social justice

	Participants			
	Carl	Molly	Sara	Maria
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context				
Critical Analysis at Systemic Level	X	X	X	X
Consideration of Larger Sociopolitical Context	X		X	
Engagement of Critical Theories	X	X	X	X
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice				
Commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony	X		X	X
Application of critical consciousness	X		X	
Social Reconstruction as an explicit goal	X		X	

Research Question 2: Development of Conceptions of Social Justice

The second research question aims to explore what experiences shaped DSTEs' conceptions of social justice:

RQ2: What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?

In this section, I present each DSTE as a case, drawing on within-case analysis (Yin, 1999) to provide a holistic understanding of the experiences that contributed to that DSTE's development of conceptions of social justice. I applied inductive analysis of the four DSTEs using the interview two data. After discussing each case separately, I then engage in cross-case analysis and present two themes, drawing from inductive analysis of interview data. Through cross-case analysis (Creswell et al., 2007) I identified these themes from the data:

Theme 1: DSTEs' conceptions of social justice were shaped through four developmental experiences: including early encounters with injustice, exposure to critical theories, participation in communities of practice, and engagement with institutional tensions.

Theme 2: The trajectory of each DSTE's conception was differentiated by the timing, context, and substance of these experiences, leading to distinct pathways of development.

These findings are loosely chronological – going from DSTEs' childhood, through to their experience in higher education and teacher preparation, into their experiences teaching, and finishing with their time as a doctoral student. While there are differences between the experiences of the DSTEs, they all followed a similar trajectory with the development of their conceptions of social justice. Each “phase” of DSTEs' journeys extended, redirected, dismissed, reinterpreted, modified, or confirmed (Wenger, 1998) their conceptions of social justice. The DSTEs' conceptions of social justice are not static, and these findings do not aim to present them as such. Rather, my goal for this section is to describe how DSTEs' conceptions of social justice changed over time. Carl summarized this dynamic process for developing conceptions of social justice:

a commitment to social justice is a process, not a destination. A commitment to social justice will look very different depending on the context, the group of students, and the unique personalities, identities, and experiences of the students or teachers you're working with. The way you build a community that supports people's sense of belonging and amplifies their voices will vary across different spaces. The kinds of injustices affecting students structurally will also differ from one context to another. So, while I became more aware of systemic injustices, I also realized that social justice education is

like a muscle - it is continuously shaped by interactions with different people and contexts (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

In this section, I explore how each person's social justice "muscle" grew and changed over time and highlight the similarities and differences between the DSTEs' experiences.

Carl

Childhood Experiences with Injustice: Carl's childhood experiences with injustice extended his conceptions of social justice. Carl experienced two forms of oppression as a child – economic insecurity and homophobia:

My childhood felt very precarious. I grew up in rural, upstate New York, Western New York, in a family that experienced varying levels of poverty at different times in my life. So coming from a working class background and having to be a child navigating what poverty was like, and not knowing if money was going to be there, and not knowing if food was going to be there, not knowing if electricity was going to be there, not having heat (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl's economic hardship extended his understanding of the injustices that people face. He also experienced discrimination for being queer. These experiences with injustice led to Carl extending his conceptions of social justice and developing a more complex understanding of what oppression entails:

What I was realizing during those like formative years of my life, from birth to maybe 18 to 22 was this weird sense of hypocrisy that I saw around the ways people talked about equity and the way that it actually played out in real life. So I felt very discriminated against for being queer or being working class, and the spaces where I was most discriminated against were all White spaces. So it gave me this realization that like discrimination can happen everywhere, and like Whiteness or White supremacy is designed in a way to cannibalize itself, or kind of cannibalize its own, and with the smallest bit of difference, it can be turned against anyone. And so as I navigated different spaces with dominant identities, being a White male and marginalized identities being queer, working class person, I kind of started to understand the intersection of privilege and power, like fused with the oppression, and how your context, the way that your context shifts, very much depends on how you are perceived and how you leverage or don't leverage your identities, and it can also mean that you're humanized or dehumanized, depending on how your perceived in your context (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl highlighted the discrimination that he felt in White spaces despite being White. His peers differentiated and discriminated against him based on his economic standing and his sexual orientation. He soon realized that “discrimination can happen everywhere” and that context is important for how you are perceived. Through his firsthand experiences with injustice during his childhood he began to develop a more refined understanding of oppression.

Introduction to Critical Theories: The second phase of Carl’s development of social justice conceptions was an exposure to critical theories. During his undergraduate program he “stumbled into the discipline of sociology, and it kind of provided me with the language that I needed to make sense of the way I was trying to understand the world” (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24). Carl reinterpreted his experiences with injustices during his childhood when he was exposed to critical theories during his sociology studies. These theories gave him the language necessary to understand and name his experiences. During his sociology degree he had two courses that exposed him to a critical perspective and developed his conceptions of social justice:

I took two courses that were pretty foundational to that perspective. One was a community organizing course, and then the other course was a service-learning course where we worked with, we worked as mentors to middle schoolers for a public school in the Bed-Stuy neighborhood in New York City. And both of those professors had a critical perspective through which they viewed sociology, and they had similar critiques to the discipline of sociology sometimes being too far removed from people, and so I appreciated the way that they positioned sociology, not as a solely academic, abstract discipline that only happens in journal articles and only happens at conferences. It is a public sociology that happens through dialogue and discourse with people (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

These professors not only instilled a critical perspective in Carl that helped him to understand his childhood experiences. They also reaffirmed his belief that he can only address injustices through action. To Carl, social justice was not just an abstract idea but needed to be something that happened through “dialogue and discourse” with others.

Carl's exposure to critical scholars during his time as an undergraduate student had an impact on him as a teacher:

Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky are two foundational thinkers that influence the way that I viewed education. So they're always at the forefront of my mind. And I've gone back to Pablo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, and Saul Alinsky's Rules for Radicals, which is one of his books about community organizing, so that like revisitation of those texts that were foundational to me can reinforce my belief system when I feel like I'm wavering, or when I feel like I'm losing my path or losing my desire to be justice oriented or be liberation oriented (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl used critical scholars as both a guide and a support system during his time as a teacher.

They helped to guide his beliefs when he was struggling and support his resolve towards justice-oriented teaching when he was wavering.

Carl's conceptions of social justice were also extended by critical theory he was exposed to during his doctoral studies: "Critical race theory with Dr. J and pedagogy of teacher education with Dr. P – a lot of articles we analyzed helped me to problematize physical space as it relates to where we think teacher education can happen" (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Exposure to critical theories were an important factor in developing Carl's conceptions of social justice. The exposure to these critical theories often occurred through social participation with teacher education faculty. Social participation also played a significant role in Carl's development, extending and refining his conceptions of social justice.

Social Participation in Communities of Practice: Interacting with others in various communities of practice shaped Carl's conceptions of social justices. These interactions or social participation looked different based on the context. After facing frustrations with the treatment of social justice in his undergraduate and masters programs (discussed in the barriers section) Carl sought out others who agreed with his view of social justice "I think I was constantly trying to seek out other people that had the same vision of teaching as social justice, and I was able to find that

within my school” (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Carl’s interactions with others who shared his vision of social justice helped to extend his conceptions of social justice. By seeing others pursue social justice in practice, rather than in theory, he saw new possibilities for what he could do. For example, when he was still a P-12 teacher, his principal “helped to introduce a race and equity group as part of our academic leadership team” (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Through this leadership team, Carl was able to design a critical professional development for staff members – thinking about justice, equity, and identity and their impact on how their interactions with each other and impact on interactions with students. These collaborative experiences reveal to Carl the power of working with others towards a common mission. This led him to develop his own mission of creating a strong community of social justice-oriented people. This mission motivated Carl to pursue a PhD and so he left teaching to:

build a network of people who had that same orientation to justice and liberation, but were thinking about it from multiple perspectives and thinking about it across disciplines and across levels in education, so not just K12 schools but also higher education, and then also thinking about the interconnectedness of levels of education and how they can be complimentary to one another (Carl, Interview 2)

During his doctoral studies, Carl began to develop that network through an ongoing dialogue with one of his DSTE peers. These conversations help to further shape those conceptions of social justice that he had developed during his time teaching. These conversations involved an intellectual struggle of the problems around justice:

[we have a lot] of deep conversations about how do we as people and teach educators share our vision of what justice is with communities that we might where we might be outsiders, and how do we listen to validate, authenticate, and incorporate the perspectives of those communities with our vision of justice in a way that feels reciprocal and mutually respectful and humanizing for ourselves and humanizing for those people (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Here Carl’s ongoing interaction with a peer helped him to refine his conceptions of social justice. These conversations with peers were key to his development:

My refined idea of justice is in critical challenges, we've been able to provide each other for what does justice look like, and who gets to have justice? And how do you share your conception of justice with other people in a way that doesn't reflect colonial logics, White supremacy (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl's development of a resistance-oriented conception of social justice was shaped by positive social participation. His learning process reflects Wenger's (1998) theory that conceptions are not acquired in isolation but are formed through participation in communities of practice where individuals negotiate meaning and identity. Talking through ideas of social justice with peers, particularly in collaborative and reflective spaces, helped Carl refine his thinking and clarify his commitments. These dialogic experiences allowed him to test, revise, and reaffirm his justice-oriented values in the context of shared practice.

Institutional Tensions: Carl experienced tensions around the implementation of social justice both at school and higher education. His exposure to the hypocrisy of how institutions treated social justice led to a tension between how institutions treated social justice versus how he believed social justice should be treated by institutions. This tension led Carl to reflect on how social justice should be treated by institutions, extended his critical consciousness, and shaped his conceptions of social justice.

During his undergraduate studies, Carl found that there was a "demographic shift of students from being predominantly working class at my community college to being predominantly upper middle-class White" (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24) The upper middle class White students in his sociology classes took a deficit mindset towards others who were experiencing oppression. Hearing how others were talking about minorities and those in poverty helped to reinforce his conception of social justice as needing "dialogue" between people. Social justice was not something that happened during a conversation in a university course, but out in the community.

Carl became frustrated with how institutions claimed to be for social justice but failed to focus on power structures and systemic oppression. He was critical of how his sociology program that he graduated from as an undergraduate focused more on macro level analysis rather than the day to day, and he wanted his teaching experience to directly impact people for the better:

What I wanted from sociology, because I had this lens to critically analyze race, class privilege and power, and how that impacts the way that we teach students and the way that we think about education as a society, while also attending to my critique of the way my classes were so over focused on a macro level analysis of sociology without thinking about micro level analysis of the day to day needs of people. And my conception of teaching was that I got to do both (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl thought that teaching would be a perfect fit for him – allowing him to *do* social justice and incorporate what he had learned during his sociology degree. However, he found that during his time with Teach for America and his master’s program that the treatment of social justice was not critical enough:

they are an institution that proclaims to be justice oriented, but their practice doesn’t seem to match their theory, or their practice is more rooted in the theories of multiculturalism and the idea of the United States as a melting pot, and teaching should be an exposure to multiple cultures and multiple perspectives, which I think is a beautiful starting point, but what I felt was missing from both the alternative certification program and my master’s program was the justice portion of multiculturalism (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl criticized the treatment of social justice as a ‘celebration of diversity’. While recognizing the importance of culture is important, recognition does not address the “power influences” that are causing the oppression. Carl criticized what Gorski (2009) categorized as a liberal conception of social justice. Seeing the liberal treatment of social justice spurred Carl to adopt a more critical approach (Gorski, 2009) that focused on recognizing and addressing the “power influences.”

Carl advocated for his students and school while he was a teacher. He described collaborating with a community of teachers to lobby Washington D.C council members and the school board to remove an unjust school rating system. Carl testified multiple times at various board meetings advocating for the modification of the rating system. Advocating for a more just rating system involved collaborating with community members - “[I] met with various community constituents like families and students to get their perspective on what should replace the star rating system” (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Carl’s tensions from institutional norms that reproduced Whiteness and resisted equity-oriented changes shaped his conceptions of social justice. His critical stance toward these institutions was not simply a reaction but part of an evolving conception grounded in resistance. *Summary* - Carl’s conceptions of social justice developed through a layered interplay of personal experience, engagement with theory, and navigating institutional barriers. Early life encounters with race and class injustice laid a foundation that was later sharpened by exposure to critical theories such as Freirean pedagogy and critical race theory during his doctoral program. These frameworks allowed Carl to connect personal experiences to broader systems of oppression, shifting his understanding of social justice from interpersonal fairness to structural critique. His learning deepened through participation in communities of practice, where reflective dialogue with peers reinforced his evolving beliefs and teaching commitments (Wenger, 1998).

Resisting institutional barriers was also an important process in his development. As the process of recognizing the norms that upheld Whiteness led to tensions that forced Carl to confront contradictions between institutional rhetoric and reality. His trajectory aligns with Gorski’s (2009) teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice, demonstrating how DSTE’s develop through both supportive and constraining contexts. Carl’s experience

underscores the significance of situated learning and institutional tension in shaping DSTEes who prepare teachers to critique and transform systems of oppression.

Molly

Childhood Experiences of Injustice: As someone self-described as White-presenting, Molly did not experience personal injustice related to her race but witnessed her family members of color experience it. Through these experiences, she expanded her conceptions of social justice and saw how oppression operated based on race and linguistic injustice:

I do have cousins who I'm really close with, who present more as Black, and cousins who I'm really close with, who present more as Asian. And in spending a lot of time with them, like, there were times where we were, like, all hanging out as a group, and, like, noticing that they were receiving, like, noticeably different treatment was something that always just kind of, like, stuck with me (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

Molly described her childhood experiences and how she noticed that her family members who did not present as White were receiving different treatment than herself. Furthermore, her upbringing in a diverse family helped her to better understand both racial and linguistic injustices:

Yeah, I come from a mixed-race family and a very diverse upbringing. I grew up in a diverse school and neighborhood, so even though I am clearly White presenting, interacting with people of color was not new to me when I started working at this school (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

Molly's upbringing meant that she extended her understanding of racial injustices. She also grew up in a bilingual household. That childhood experience, like her experiences with racial injustice, expanded her conceptions of linguistic injustice:

talk about immigrants' experiences working in factories and like their treatment as non-English speaking members of society. My grandmother didn't speak English until the 1960s (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

Molly highlighted how her experience with her grandmother and their treatment as immigrants helped her to understand how non-English speaking members of society were treated unjustly.

Introduction to Critical Theory: Molly had a non-traditional pathway to teaching – prior to pursuing her Ph.D. and her role as a DSTE, she was a theatre major who had worked in a secondary school theatre department. Her role slowly transitioned from working in the department to teaching in the department. After her experiences with secondary teaching, she decided to pursue a Master of Teaching. Her exposure to critical theory as part of her preparation to be a teacher happened later in her career.

During her undergraduate degree Molly was exposed to critical theory, but not in relation to education: "Literature, theater, and film-based classes where we were talking about critical theory, but a lot of them were in the context of, like, 'Let's examine, like, the societal structures that are being examined in this film'" (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24) During her master's program she was exposed to conversations about diversity and inclusion, but did not learn about critical theories "We had a lot of great conversations in classes, but we never had any classes that were about, like, diversity and inclusion, never about social justice" (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24) It was not until her doctoral studies, when exposed to different educational research literature and research methods, that she was exposed to critical theories related to education.

Molly's conceptions of social justice expanded significantly during her doctoral program, particularly through her introduction to Participatory Action Research (PAR). She described being drawn to its emphasis on collaboration, equity, and action: "I was super interested in PAR—love, like, the idea of action research. Love doing action research" (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24). PAR's emphasis on researching with participants rather than on them resonated deeply with Molly's emerging commitment to justice-oriented research practices. This aligns with a relational and humanizing approach to social justice, where process and participation are

central. She further emphasized her interest in these approaches when asked about what scholars were influential on her conceptions of social justice:

[scholar] talks about Whiteness and teacher education that I just loved. I found it really fascinating and also, like, really eye-opening. It's very centered on this idea of, like, how we talk about multiculturalism and anti-racism, but that it's like we're not doing anything about it (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

While Molly did not reference specific critical scholars or articulate how critical theory had explicitly shaped her thinking, this absence may reflect her current stage of development as a DSTE rather than a lack of engagement in social justice. Her emphasis on the “idea” and “doing” of action research suggests that she may be integrating theory through practice rather than through citation or academic language. It also highlights how DSTEs may internalize social justice frameworks experientially, through methods like PAR, before being able to name or critically analyze their theoretical influences. This finding underscores the importance of doctoral coursework and methodological exposure in shaping DSTE conceptions, even if that development is still in progress or articulated through practice rather than theory. Molly’s case reminds us that conceptual development is ongoing and can enact in ways that are deeply felt but not always theoretically named.

Social Participation in Communities of Practice - Molly’s conceptions of social justice were shaped through meaningful social participation in communities of practice with diverse individuals across new educational and professional contexts. Her learning emerged not from formal instruction alone, but from listening to, interacting with, and seeking insight from peers and mentors across her journey as a student and teacher.

Molly’s first encountered a shift in her understanding with the move from high school student to her undergraduate studies with a highly international student body. Being surrounded

by linguistic and cultural diversity extended her understanding around multilingualism and changed her outlook on how to view others:

So many languages and so many nationalities represented at all times that you could never understand, never assume a common language. You could never assume someone's nationality or home language by being an international student or being a multilingual student (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

These daily interactions and friendships challenged Molly to reflect more deeply on cultural responsibility and interpersonal accountability.

A similar process unfolded during her master's program, where she studied alongside racially and culturally diverse cohort of educators. During her master's program she stated that "I was thankful that I was in a diverse enough space that we kind of accidentally got exposed to some interesting conversations" (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24) For Molly, those interesting conversations involved hearing teachers of color discuss issues of race in education:

But the way the conversation evolved was two different factions of teachers of color, because I'll say, thankfully, most of the White teachers were smart enough to just listen. They were talking about how they felt about rules in schools, about pulling your pants up versus allowing kids to have saggy jeans (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

Hearing the perspectives of teachers of color helped Molly to reconsider her approach to teaching and extend her conceptions of social justice:

It was interesting to gain additional perspectives on these issues. At the time, I was working in a predominantly Black school, and the conversation gave me a lot to think about. I never told my students how to dress anyway, but hearing different viewpoints made me reflect. Ultimately, I decided it was best to stay out of that particular discussion (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

For Molly, moving to a new context was enough to expand her social justice conceptions. She took a "listener stance" learning through social participation with her peers.

After graduating from her teacher preparation program and beginning her role as a teacher, Molly moved from a listener stance to a problem-solver stance, seeking out others for

support as needed. For example, she was struggling with how to approach a school policy about student dress code. She was hesitant on the correct course of action because of her race so she approached another teacher for support:

I don't think it's a White woman's place to be, like, limiting a Black boy's autonomy in this way, in the same way that, like, coming from an older Black guy, it would be, like, it just is, like, a very different flavor to it, if you understand what I'm saying (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

Molly also sought support from mentors who shaped how she approached teaching:

Like, I had a conversation with a mentor in my master's program that inspired me to have a conversation with another [teacher], who was a guidance counselor at my school, that very much influenced the way that I interact with my students" (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24)

Molly's evolving conceptions of social justice were shaped through active participation in diverse communities, what Wenger (1998) calls learning as social participation within communities of practice. Her shift from listener to problem-solver illustrates how engagement with peers and mentors supported her development as an educator. Her learning journey also reflects movement across Gorski's (2009) typology. Early experiences emphasized liberal multiculturalism, fostering awareness of diversity. Over time, however, through critical conversations and reflection, her thinking aligned more with critical multiculturalism, focused on systemic inequities and the complexities of teaching across racial and cultural lines. Molly's case highlights how social justice learning is deeply relational and situated. Through participation, reflection, and mentorship, she developed more nuanced and critical approaches to justice in education.

Institutional Tensions: Molly found that faculty at her master's program lacked a deep understanding of social justice. This absence of pedagogical clarity became a tension that she had to navigate as a developing teacher. The tension lay in the contradiction between the

institution's rhetorical embrace of social justice and its failure to provide meaningful preparation or modeling of how to enact it. As she explained:

Because even these people [teacher educators] with expertise in ELA and doing lesson plans had no idea what these social justice standards contained or how they would be incorporated into a lesson plan. They were just saying, like, 'I don't know, look them up on the website and do it,' because we've just been told that this is a new addition we're doing (Molly, Interview 2, 10.14.24).

This disconnect produced a development opportunity for Molly. Molly was being told by the institution that social justice was an institutional priority, but on the other hand, she witnessed a lack of substantive engagement from those charged with teaching her. This tension shaped her conception of social justice in two ways:

1. Recognition of institutional superficiality: she came to see how institutions can symbolically adopt equity language without building the knowledge base, resources, or accountability structures needed to support enactment.
2. Extension of her own understanding: the gap prompted her to reflect critically on how teacher education programs themselves reproduce inequities by failing to model justice-centered pedagogy.

Through this tension, Molly's conceptions of social justice were extended beyond individual teaching practices to include a critique of institutional discourse and accountability. The tension was not merely an obstacle, but a site of professional growth, pushing Molly to develop a more critical awareness of how rhetoric and practice diverge in teacher education.

Summary- Molly's development of social justice conceptions illustrates how DSTEs may grow through relationships and practice before fully articulating theoretical frameworks. Her justice orientation developed through childhood exposure to racial and linguistic injustice in her diverse family and later expanded through university and professional contexts where she adopted a

listener stance with diverse peers and mentors. PAR during her doctoral studies provided an entry point into critical approaches, emphasizing justice as collaborative and action-oriented work. Confronting institutional tension around the superficial treatments of social justice in teacher education programs sharpened her critique of institutional rhetoric versus practice. Molly's trajectory reflects a gradual shift from liberal awareness toward critical awareness (Gorski, 2009), demonstrating how conceptions of justice can be extended through social participation in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) even when not yet firmly anchored in theory.

Sara

Childhood Experiences with Injustice: Sara's childhood experiences with injustice shaped her conceptions of social justice. Reflecting on her childhood, Sara stated how experiencing injustice firsthand and discussing injustices with her family shaped her:

My past experience has shaped everything. Right? I can't undo me. I can't separate my cross-bordering experiences. I talked about it before—I can't separate myself from the linguistic oppression that was thrown on me growing up. That shaped me until I was about 25. Then, when I started doing the readings, I began to articulate these experiences differently (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara extended her conceptions of social justice as a child as she experienced injustices as well as privilege. As a young child, she had the privilege of lighter skin, but also faced the oppression that came with being from a lower class:

So I always grew up with like this acknowledgement that I was like kind of lower class, beginning middle income, with lots of social justice ideas in my head, but also privilege in my Whiteness, and so I always feel like, like I was in a private school, but I was a kid wearing the donation clothes, right? So I was always like, in this space of border crossing (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara's conceptions of social justice were also extended through witnessing injustices that occurred towards her family:

experience mostly xenophobia, ideology, discrimination, and seeing the impact of colorism in people, in my circle, in my family, not me, because I actually got the opposite because of my light skin. I think that all like kind of informs the kind of teacher I became (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Here Sara is describing how she experienced the impact of injustice on her family and how she recognized that her skin color changed how others were treated.

When Sara was 15, she immigrated to the United States. This move expanded and encouraged her to reinterpret her understandings of social justice as she experienced the challenges that immigrant students face:

we're gonna show those gringos that we are made of intelligence, brilliance and ability to, like, do all cool things. We didn't have any English [immigration was a] pivotal point [...] it was a hard transition. But that process, like, in that process, I think that's where I started thinking about being an educator, because I had horrible experience, and had amazing school (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara's immigration experience, moving to the United States, was formative for her interest in education and becoming a teacher. The variation in experience with supportive and dismissive teachers during her childhood inspired her to become a teacher. It also introduced her to different forms of oppression. In this next quote, Sara describes her varied experience with her P-12 teachers:

[positive experience of having] an English teacher who decided to do memoirs, and I was like 'Oh shit, I can write about my experiences.' And also having people who are like you don't belong in AP because you don't have enough English. You know, I'm like, 'But I already know about the parts of the flower, that biology class is bullshit. (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara's conceptions of social justice were also influenced by her family. She developed a complex understanding of social justice due to her parents' discussions with her. I discuss these in the following section, introduction to critical theories.

Introduction to Critical Theories: Sara's introduction to critical theories happened early during her childhood due to her parents. Sara's parents were resolute on social justice – so much so that

they named her after Karl Marx's wife "Natalia is my middle name, Natalia is like Marx's wife's name" (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24). Sara's father participated in labor organizing:

My father's involvement in labor organizing, he was like, university professor, labor organizer, economist, like he has three jobs. Was like, 'your parents have a lot of books that people might not like, and so if the police comes in and they take anybody, you have to run to your grandmother's house, right?' And so that was the talk that I had growing up (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara's parents met and fell in love during community organizing:

a friend of theirs got killed. And so it was really interesting, because my mom comes from church organizing. My father comes from, like, Marxist organizing. And so they the youth in that community got together, and that's where they fell in love. So organizing to make the space safer, more welcoming of young people deal with some of the injustices in the community (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Her parents' dedication to labor organizing and social justice meant that Sara learned about conceptions of social justice early in life through discussion with her parents. She was told from an early age about the injustices that were occurring in the world and she experienced via her parents what practical efforts were needed to address those injustices.

Sara was exposed to a variety of critical scholars during her Latin American undergraduate degree at Private Northeastern University:

The Private University, which a pretty progressive school up in [the Northeast], like I read, you know, do you Freire and I read so seminal texts, like Anne Saddua and Cherry Moraga, like that's that happened there, as in, like reading it, but the concepts were not that unfamiliar, because like like as the 80s like there was terrorism in and there was like also a guerilla movement and there was also like a community leftist movement, right? And so I would have conversations with my parents about like, 'Oh today at school they told me you about leftist blah blah blah' (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara noted that while reading these critical theorists, they were confirming her conceptions of social justice that she had obtained during her childhood. Experiences with terrorism and leftist movements meant that the concepts discussed by the scholars in her undergraduate courses were

familiar to her. During her doctoral studies, she was exposed to new critical theories that have extended her conceptions of social justice further:

...some of it has really validated some things that I've experienced, and some of it has nourished and kind of, like expanded my thinking. Like, for example, the whole conception of translanguaging right? Like I came from bilingual school where there was like language separation that way we can really maintain you know fidelity to Spanish fidelity to English, but then reading more and thinking about my own experience bilingualism....more creative and more curious about things that I could have done differently in that, in terms of that, that such that linguistic justice piece (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Here, Sara described how critical theory served not only to validate her lived experiences but also to push the boundaries of her thinking. Her exposure to the concept of translanguaging prompted her to re-evaluate her prior practices in bilingual education. This reflection extended her conception of social justice to include linguistic justice, highlighting how exposure to new theoretical frameworks can reshape existing beliefs. In this way, Sara's learning illustrates how conceptions of social justice are not static but evolve through critical engagement with theory, especially when that theory challenges previous assumptions and invites deeper consideration of justice in practice.

Social Participation in Communities of Practice: For Sara, her experiences with her students and teacher peers shaped her conceptions of social justice. Through her life, she entered into different communities of practice, each shaped her conceptions of social justice in diverse ways. First, she transitioned from teaching immigrant students to teaching second-generation students of color who were growing up in poverty:

I went from educating all new immigrant kids, as in, like, one month one day in the country, to, like four years in the country, to educating all second-generation Latino and Black kids right? And I was like, 'Oh shit. I don't know enough about this community, like, I am a generation 1. I immigrated when I was 15, but I did not grow up in the barrio' (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara's "Oh shit" moment was a recognition that she did not know enough about her students to effectively teach them. She had drawn on her own experiences as an immigrant to connect with her previous students. Her new students were a challenge, but she took an asset-based approach:

Anthony Green, like, you know, like he would, the first day I had him, he like, stabbed somebody with a pencil, and I had to figure out, like, what was his context? Like Anthony Green was brilliant, and he was an amazing storytelling, teller, and he was living in a crack house, like all of those things were part of his reality (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

She drew on her childhood experiences and how her mother broke down injustice in a more practical way by asking questions:

My mom's a social worker. A lot of her work was giving access to lower income, commenting lower income situations that were factory workers to public to public services. And so she will narrate a lot of the kind of injustice. And so it wasn't like, so theoretical. It was more like, let's break down what injustice is happening and what we can do to change it (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

The important takeaway here is the questions that Sara took to understand injustice – what injustice is happening and what can we do to change it? Sara described how one of her students was acting out in class and having a "dance party and completely ignore my class" Sara asked what that student needed. Through this experience, she extended her conceptions of what is needed for social justice.

the whole attitude thing, I was like, Oh this is new. And I have all right, I think you and I need to have a conversation right? And I just had to learn a whole new sets of techniques and strategies and kind of like mindsets, because there was a point where I was like this, kids hate me, like, literally was like, they don't like me. They think I suck. I don't have the same connections. And then I was like, Oh no. We just come from different spaces, and we have to figure out....(Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Sara stated how challenging it was to go from teaching immigrant students that she had a connection with to teaching students that were different culturally than her – as she noted - "it's a different ball game" Sara's experiences with her students expanded and modified her conceptions of social justice. She recognized that bridging racial and cultural differences as a

teacher was challenging “That level of effort that took to like bridge racial cultural differences was way more. And I gotta say, like, I wasn’t prepared for it, like my first year was a disaster.” (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Sara’s experience teaching students from different racial and cultural backgrounds than her own challenged and reshaped her conception of social justice. While she felt prepared to teach immigrant students she related to, she described her first year with culturally different students as “a disaster,” highlighting how bridging those differences required more effort than expected. This struggle became a key learning moment.

Her reflection aligns with Wenger’s (1998) idea that learning and identity formation occur through participation and tension within social contexts. For RQ2, Sara’s experience shows that conceptions of social justice are developed not only through theory but also through navigating real-world challenges.

Sara’s conceptions of social justice were also shaped by social participation with her teaching peers. Her peers helped her to work through the challenges she faces as a teacher “they coached me through [challenges]” (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24) She relied on those teachers who could connect with students to show her methods for bridging cultural and racial divides:

I need your support. He’s an art teacher, you know, a black man with dreds who I loved his class. And I was like, ‘Dude, like help me bridge,’ right? And so I had to think about how to bridge this distrust for light skinned Latina woman who had an accent and who did not grow up in [the neighborhood], right? (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

The important takeaway here is that Sara’s social participation with peers did more than provide emotional support, it served as a place of learning that expanded her understanding of what social justice teaching entails. Her collaboration with colleagues, particularly those who shared cultural backgrounds with her students, offered both practical strategies and new perspectives that helped her confront the limitations of her own positionality. For research question 2, this

illustrates how DSTEs develop their conceptions of social justice through relational learning and collaboration.

Institutional Tensions: Sara's experiences with institutional tensions led to the development of her conceptions of social justice. First, she navigated the tension between the institutional demand for academic standardization over ensuring academic justice. The pursuit of efficiency over justice restricted her ability to teach in a socially just way:

[I was] more of a social justice teacher when I first started teaching. It didn't go away. But I feel like some of the pressure of standardized tests and the common core like and the fact that there was more like standardized curriculum held me back a little bit (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Early in Sara's career, before the increased accountability and standardized testing caused by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), she had more flexibility with what and how she taught. This allowed her to teach in a way that connected with her students' past experiences - "we're going to have a unit about generational differences.....unit about Utopia to create societies that we want to see" (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Increased restrictions on her teaching by the school district extended her conceptions of social justice as she recognized that the flexible approach to teaching was more beneficial for her students. Furthermore, this focus on "efficiency, revenue, status" (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24) made Sara question the purpose of education "Why are we doing this? Why are we educating" (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24).

Sara also navigated tensions during her time as a doctoral student at the college of education that extended and reinforced her conceptions of social justice. During her time as a doctoral student, she did see teacher educators who were committed to social justice. However, in her role as a researcher, she began to see that the social justice statements from the college of education were not being acted on. The tension she experienced was her goal of social justice

versus the university faculty who were more concerned about advancing their own research agendas than helping to overcome community injustices:

[Teacher educators have] disconnect between words and actions, and I've seen that not so much in the courses that I've taken, because I've been very selective with who I want to take classes with, but more in like the GAship experiences or the I'm part of a research project.....it feels so transactional with community (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

During her research project, Sara would go into meetings to discuss the community, but found that the discussion always moved away from the community members and towards how to get published:

I went into a research meeting where I thought we were discussing the people we were serving and we were discussing how were going to further our research agenda. And what will we get published and I was like, 'Fuck this [research ends up as the] same utilitarian, White supremacist, capitalist dichotomy' (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Seeing how what faculty focused on extended Sara's conceptions of social justice as she developed her understanding about how faculty in colleges of education operated – as she put it “how you move tells me your intentions right?” (Sara, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Institutional tensions were a generative learning point, helping to Sara to reinterpret and modify her conceptions of social justice as she better understood the institutional treatments of social justice.

Summary- Sara's trajectory highlights how immigrant identity, lived oppression, and activist family history form a powerful foundation for social justice teaching. Her conceptions of social justice developed through firsthand experiences of xenophobia, linguistic oppression, and class marginalization, later extended through critical theory that both validated and pushed her thinking, especially around linguistic justice. Social participation in communities of practice with students and peers challenged her to bridge cultural divides she had not personally experienced, reshaping her approach to justice in practice. Institutional tensions around standardized testing and performative higher education deepened her critique, underscoring how systems constrain

justice even while claiming to promote it. Sara's development exemplifies Gorski's (2009) conception of teaching as resistance and Wenger's (1998) claim that learning emerges through participation and struggle, demonstrating how DSTEs' social justice conceptions evolve through both communities of practice and institutional tensions.

Maria

Experiences with Childhood Injustices: Maria's childhood experiences with injustice played a role in the development of her conceptions of social justice. As a child Maria lived on the border between the United States and Mexico:

I was born in Arizona, but I'm from a border town. My parents lived in Arizona—both of my parents are from Mexico—but my dad immigrated to Arizona. And so, for that reason, we children were born in Arizona, but we were actually raised in Mexico (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

During her childhood, Maria moved from Mexico to the United States. When she entered schools in Arizona, she faced Proposition 203 that mandated English only language in schools. Maria was not allowed to speak Spanish, her native language. She went from being an academically "strong" student in Mexico to being seen as a "lower" student in the U.S. because she did not have the language skills necessary to succeed. It was this experience with linguistic oppression that extended her conceptions of social justice: "I didn't realize that my language was not only neglected in the school system for the first couple of years, but it was very much oppressed—and therefore, my identity, you know?" (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24). Maria's experience with personal injustice extended her conception of social justice because she began to understand what linguistic oppression was.

Introduction to Critical Theories: Maria learned about critical theories during her master's program at a private Northeast university – this exposure extended her conceptions of social justice:

I helped develop a bilingual certificate at Boston College because—me and a friend—we were doing our master’s program at Boston College, and we realized that all of the conversations we were having were, like, super amazing. We were learning about critical race theory, we were learning about urban education and the history of U.S. schooling (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Maria’s childhood experiences of injustice were mostly related to linguistic oppression.

Therefore, her experiences with critical race theory and urban education extended her conceptions of social justice.

Social Participation in Communities of Practice: Maria’s conceptions of social justice were extended and refined during in her community of practice as a doctoral student. The interactions with her research team was an important place for her to co-construct new ideas: "I think my research team has been the biggest and most meaningful place where I’ve been co-constructing new ideas of social justice and equity" (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24) Moving to the doctoral program introduced Maria to injustices beyond that of bilingual oppression - "because we’re not only thinking about expanding bilingual programs—I’m not, I’m no longer thinking about dual language as the thing that will, like, help everything and everyone" (Maria , Interview 2, 10.23.24) For Maria, helping everyone meant moving from addressing not only linguistic injustice, but racial and economic injustice as well: "Martin County (pseudonym) is serving a lot of Black students who aren’t getting enough support and who aren’t getting opportunities to be in bilingual programs as much as other kids" (Maria , Interview 2, 10.23.24) During her work as a research assistant, Maria was exposed to a lot of different research projects in the community.

These research projects were more focused on students of color:

And so, I think that has shaped my understanding of social justice with regards to this population right here, because this is where I’m at—I’m teaching in a [Mid-Atlantic State], but I’m also working very closely, making lots of partnerships with the County (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Learning about a new population and the injustices that they experience extended Maria's conceptions of social justice.

Maria and Sara are co-teachers in a course, their interactions during co-planning played a key role in shaping Maria's conceptions of social justice and how to approach her role as a teacher educator. When discussing how to refine the syllabus they received from another teacher educator, they collaborated to try and make it more critical:

And so, we are always thinking about, 'How can we make this [syllabus] more critical?' Because it is not critical enough, and it doesn't have enough space right now for them to actually practice what they are reading or what we are teaching (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Here the takeaway is that Maria's conceptions of social justice were shaped through a sustained conversation back and forth between a peer where they wrestled with their work as teacher educators and whether they were being true to their goals in the course they were teaching: "And so, I think those really critical conversations are happening a lot during our co-planning" (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

Institutional Tensions: Maria's navigation of institutional tension around linguistic injustice extended her conceptions of social justice. As a teacher, she returned to teach in the same Arizona school system where she had experienced linguistic oppression as a child. Becoming the perpetrator of the oppression by not allowing students to speak in Spanish, the home language that many of them used regularly and with great facility, led Maria to question what she was doing as a teacher, but at the time she was not ready to push back against the injustices. She described her feelings at the time - "This doesn't feel right. But I didn't have the education or the context, or - I felt very vulnerable at that time" (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24) This period, where she was part of the oppression of her multilingual students was a significant moment in her development of a social justice approach to her teaching. She describes that time as her "great

maestro – because I think that was where my critical consciousness journey began – even though I didn't have the words for it then" (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24) being a part of the cause of linguistic oppression led Maria to develop critical consciousness and begin to reflect on schooling and seek ways that she could address injustices. For example, during her time as a teacher in Boston, she began to question how schools were treating students and special education:

I mean, especially during the pandemic, I was like, I don't know, should we be putting this many kids in special education just because they aren't able to regulate their emotions yet? I don't know. It didn't make sense to me (Maria, Interview 2, 10.23.24)

The takeaway here is that Maria's tensions during early teaching experience, where she found herself replicating the very forms of linguistic oppression she had endured, was a powerful catalyst in the development of her critical consciousness. Although she lacked the theoretical tools and confidence to challenge these injustices at the time, the dissonance she felt laid the groundwork for her evolving social justice orientation. This moment of discomfort and contradiction became a source of reflection and transformation, demonstrating how engaging directly with institutional injustice, especially when positioned as both victim and agent, can deepen educators' conceptions of justice and fuel a commitment to more equitable teaching practices.

Summary- Maria's development underscores how linguistic oppression can be both a site of harm and a catalyst for critical consciousness. Experiencing English-only schooling on the U.S.-Mexico border shaped her early justice lens. Critical race theory and urban education during her master's program helped her name these experiences, while doctoral participation in research teams and co-teaching expanded her scope to include racial and economic inequities.

Confronting the tension around her complicity in reproducing linguistic oppression as a teacher

became a turning point. This moment was her “great maestro” and sparked critical reflection and deepened her commitment to equity. Maria’s trajectory shows how DSTEs’ conceptions of justice are developed through the interplay of lived experience, theory, and relational practice, and how tension between personal history and institutional demands can serve as powerful catalysts for critical consciousness.

Research Question 2: Cross-Case Analysis

Theme 1: A Pathway towards Conceptions of Social Justice

The DSTEs all had similar experiences that led to the development of their conceptions of social justice: 1) childhood experiences with injustice 2) introduction to critical theories 3) social participation in communities of practice and 4) institutional tensions. In this section, I describe each part of the ‘pathway’ towards their social justice conceptions. The differences between the DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice are determined by their exposure to critical theories (when) and different forms of injustice (what) (discussed in section Theme 2).

Table 20. DSTE childhood experiences of injustice and impact on conceptions of social justice

	Childhood experiences with injustice	Impact on Conceptions
Carl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Witnessed systemic inequities in education and broader society. - Experienced firsthand the impact of institutional oppression. -Experienced firsthand economic hardship and discrimination due to being queer. 	-Extended his conceptions of social justice
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observed institutional failures in addressing equity and justice. - Noticed the impact of Whiteness on schooling and student experiences. 	-Extended her conceptions of social justice
Sara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experienced both privilege and oppression as a Latina woman. - Noticed racial and social inequities from an early age. 	-Extended her conceptions of social justice
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experienced linguistic oppression in school due to monolingual norms. - Saw multilingual students struggle with identity and belonging in the U.S. education system. 	-Extended her conceptions of social justice

Childhood Experiences of Injustice: I define childhood as from birth to when DSTEs began higher education. Each DSTE experienced a form of childhood injustice that shaped their mission as an educator (see Table 20.). Carl, Maria, and Sara experienced early exposure to personal injustice. This exposure involved experiences with racism, linguistic, colorism, classism, and homophobia. The result of these experiences was DSTEs extending their conceptions of social justice to understanding that there are people who experience oppression and there are those that oppress others. Molly observed her family experience injustice due to the color of their skin and the harm that Whiteness can have on the student experience. DSTEs' childhood experiences of injustice extended their conceptions of social justice as they learned the types of injustice that exist.

Introduction to Critical Theories: DSTEs' introduction to critical theories happened through readings, lectures, and coursework during their preparation as doctoral students. DSTEs were introduced to authors who presented various critical theories that played distinct but interconnected roles in shaping each DSTE's conceptions of social justice. For Carl, exposure to sociology and Freirean pedagogy allowed him to reinterpret his childhood experiences of poverty and homophobia, giving him language to understand oppression as structural rather than individual. For Molly, PAR and scholarship on Whiteness in teacher education extended her conceptions by emphasizing the importance of collaborative, action-oriented research that went beyond awareness to practice. For Sara, reading Freire (1970) and other critical scholars during her undergraduate studies confirmed the activist consciousness instilled by her parents, while later doctoral exposure to translanguaging extended her thinking on linguistic justice. For Maria, coursework in critical race theory and urban education during her master's program extended her earlier focus on bilingual oppression to include racial and economic inequities, while also

helping her reinterpret her own schooling under English-only laws. In this way, critical theory did not generate their justice orientations anew but rather confirmed, reinterpreted, or extended the conceptions already seeded by their early life experiences (see Table 21).

Table 21. DSTEs introduction to critical theories and the impact on their conceptions

	Introduction to Critical Theories	Impact on Conceptions
Carl	- Introduced to Freire's (1970) critical consciousness and humanizing pedagogy in graduate school. - Engaged with postmodern and critical research perspectives during doctoral studies.	Extended and reinterpreted his conceptions of social justice.
Molly	- Did not explicitly cite critical theorists but engaged with humanizing pedagogy and PAR	Extended her conceptions of social justice
Sara	- Engaged with Freire's (1970) concepts of liberation, praxis, and critical consciousness. - Developed a deep connection to critical theories through discussions with her parents and reflection on privilege and oppression.	Extended and confirmed her conceptions of social justice
Maria	- Introduced to asset-based pedagogy (Moll et al., 1992) and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995).	Extended her conceptions of social justice

Social Participation in Communities of Practice: DSTEs' social participation in communities of practice acted as a process for change that led to their conceptions of social justice being extended, reinterpreted, and modified (see Table 22.). For DSTEs, social participation in a COP allowed them to gain insight from others through (1) changing contexts and (2) collaboration with peers. Transitions into new contexts led to interactions with new social groups, which exposed DSTEs to new injustices, problems, and ways of understanding the world. These interactions extended and modified their conceptions of social justice. For example, as explained in her member check, Maria described how her teacher education program supported her development as a social justice teacher educator by creating spaces to think critically about justice not just in theory but in everyday practice, while also being "in community with professors and peers who push my thinking and model what it means to teach in ways that center

students' languages, cultures, and lived experiences” (Maria, personal communication, July 2025). Similarly, as explained in his member check, Carl emphasized the role of “critical and collaborative dialogue” with colleagues and faculty as the most significant catalyst in refining his research and teaching interests, noting that his doctoral program offered the kind of world-building space for justice-focused work that he lacked as a classroom teacher (Carl, personal communication, July 2025). DSTEes also collaborated with peers during their time as both teachers and doctoral students, and these discussions extended, reinterpreted, and modified their conceptions of social justice. This finding echoes Cochran-Smith et al.’s (1999) study of teacher educators, where regular dialogue with colleagues influenced participants’ beliefs and perspectives, providing “insights into the perspectives of others” (p. 18). In the same way, DSTEes’ peer interactions, whether as teachers or as doctoral students, served as key moments of extension and reinterpretation in their social justice conceptions.

Table 22. DSTEes’ social participation and impact on conceptions

	Social Participation	Impact on Conceptions
Carl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively participated in teacher advocacy groups like Empower Ed. - Engaged in community organizing to change inequitable school policies. - Repeated discussions with peer on the purpose of social justice education 	-Extended, reinterpreted, and modified
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaged in institutional reform efforts within her teacher education program. -New contexts with multilingual peers and students of color. 	- Extended and modified
Sara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organized student activism, including demonstrations for immigrant rights. - Connected social movements with classroom discussions. -New context of students of color in Washington D.C. 	. Extended, reinterpreted, and modified
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Built relationships with parents to advocate for multilingual students. - Engaged in community-based approaches to support students’ cultural and linguistic identities. 	- Extended and modified

	- New context during doctoral studies with increased number of students of color	
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Institutional Tensions: DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice were not only extended by supportive communities and critical theories but also shaped by the tensions they encountered within institutional contexts. These tensions developed around institutional resistance and hypocrisy, exploitation and burnout in social justice work, and linguistic and cultural oppression (see Table 23.). DSTEs’ experiences with these tensions led them to reinterpret and modify their conceptions of social justice. In Wenger’s (1998) terms, institutional misalignments functioned as “disruptions” that prompted new meaning-making, revealing how contradictions can catalyze learning as much as supportive participation.

First, institutional hypocrisy played a significant role in shaping DSTEs’ conceptions. Carl described how his low stipend forced him to skip meals, which he interpreted as evidence of structural inequity in an institution that promoted justice rhetorically. Molly noted that during her time as a Master’s student, her faculty frequently used social justice language but rarely modeled what social justice teaching looked like in practice, leaving her without guidance. Sara critiqued the K–12 system’s obsession with efficiency and testing, which she saw mirrored in higher education’s privileging of research agendas over helping communities. Maria recalled during her time as a K-12 teacher, the dissonance of enforcing English-only requirements she once resisted, experiencing firsthand how institutional rules undermined her justice commitments. Across cases, institutions positioned themselves as advocates of social justice while simultaneously resisting its integration, sharpening DSTEs’ awareness of hypocrisy and systemic resistance.

DSTEs also described how social justice work was sustained through their own unpaid or underpaid labor, which often led to exhaustion. Carl’s material precarity made his teaching load especially burdensome, amplifying the inequities he critiqued in his courses. Sara described mid-

semester burnout, explaining that she “wanted to give [her] students more, but had nothing left in the tank,” a reflection of how equity work compounded the normal pressures of doctoral study. Molly struggled with the emotional weight of balancing accountability and care for her preservice teachers, recounting the difficulty of deciding how many extensions to grant without “doing them a disservice.” These examples illustrate how DSTEs’ commitments were sustained by personal sacrifice rather than structural support, leaving them vulnerable to burnout even as their social justice commitments deepened.

DSTEs also experienced cultural and linguistic oppression. Maria’s enforcing of Arizona’s English-only policy despite her personal opposition led to her recognizing her complicity in reproducing linguistic inequities. This contradiction forced her to grapple with the systemic marginalization of multilingual students and the silencing effects of monolingual norms. Sara also highlighted how her preservice teacher students resisted critical conversations about race and equity, revealing how White-dominated classroom spaces often prioritized comfort over discomfort necessary for growth. Molly, too, noted the lack of institutional clarity around teaching justice, which reinforced the dominance of normative pedagogies rather than critical, culturally sustaining ones. Together, these cases demonstrate how linguistic and cultural oppression operated both through explicit policy and the everyday practices that maintained inequity in teacher education spaces.

In sum, by confronting tensions, DSTEs extended, reinterpreted, and modified their conceptions of social justice. This finding underscores Wenger’s (1998) claim that misalignment within communities of practice can itself be a site of learning, and it highlights the generative, if often painful, role that institutional tensions play in the formation of DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice.

Table 23. DSTEs' institutional tensions and impact on conceptions

	Tensions around Social Justice	Impact on Conceptions
Carl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional hypocrisy—expecting social justice teaching while failing to support educators (e.g., low stipends). - Resistance from policymakers in education reform efforts. 	-Reinterpreted and modified
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional resistance to integrating social justice into teacher education. - White-dominated spaces prioritizing comfort over critical conversations. - Lack of incentive for institutions to enact meaningful change. 	-Reinterpreted and modified
Sara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overreliance on unpaid labor for social justice work in teacher education. - Burnout from lack of institutional support for equity-focused teaching. 	- Reinterpreted and modified
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Linguistic oppression through policies like Arizona's English-only law. - Monolingual norms marginalizing multilingual students. 	- Reinterpreted and modified

Theme 2: Variation in Conceptions

There are two main factors that differentiate DSTEs' conceptions of social justice: 1) early and in-depth exposure to critical theories 2) The type of personal injustices that DSTEs experienced as children and as teachers. These factors not only shaped how DSTEs came to understand social justice, but also influenced the aspect of justice they prioritized

Early Exposure to Critical Theories: Carl and Sara had early and sustained engagements with critical theories, systemic activism, and policy level change, which provided a foundation for more refined and theoretical grounded conceptions of social justice. Sara's exposure to critical theories happened during her childhood as she discussed injustices and oppression with her parents who were knowledgeable about social justice. Carl's experience learning about social justice came during his undergraduate degree that focused on sociology. For Carl and Sara, the early and sustained exposure gave them more time and cognitive space to reflect on, internalize, and revise their conceptions of social justice across contexts. In contrast. Molly and Maria were

introduced to critical frameworks later in their educational and professional journeys. While they still developed strong commitments to justice, their discussions were often more experiential and less connected to formal theory. Based on interview data and cross-case comparison, I interpret this difference as evidence that the timing and depth of exposure to critical theory plays a significant role in shaping how DSTE's conceptualize justice. Those with earlier exposure may develop a more abstract or systems-level orientation, while those introduced later may draw more heavily from lived experience. Further research is needed to determine how and when exposure most effectively shapes social justice commitments, particularly across different social and institutional contexts.

Type of Injustice Faced: The specific injustices experienced by the DSTE's also shaped the focus of their conceptions. Sara, Maria, and Molly all identified as multilingual learners and had firsthand experiences with linguistic marginalization. As a result, each emphasized the importance of linguistic justice in their teaching and articulated a commitment to validating students' home languages. Their personal histories informed a justice framework rooted in identity, culture, and language. Carl's experience was shaped by his identity as a queer person and his upbringing in a low-income household, which broadened his lens to include intersections of class, sexuality, and institutional power. His conception of social justice emphasized the structural roots of oppression and the need for policy-level change. While all four DSTE's centered equity and inclusion, their differing experiences meant that certain issues, such as linguistic rights for some and structural economic inequality for others, took precedence. Notably, other common forms of educational injustice, such as ableism and gender-based discrimination, were not central in their narratives. This suggests that DSTE's may focus on the forms of injustice they have directly encountered, underscoring the importance of reflective

practice and exposure to a wide range of perspectives in teacher education. These findings contribute to an understanding of how individual biographies, when situated within broader social and institutional contexts, inform the substance and direction of DSTEs' justice-oriented pedagogies.

Summary

Each phase of the DSTEs' journeys extended, redirected, dismissed, reinterpreted, modified, or confirmed their understandings of social justice (Wenger, 1998). Their conceptions did not emerge in isolation but developed through a set of overlapping experiences that pressed them to confront injustice, seek language to name it, and reframe their own roles as educators.

One developmental phase was childhood experiences with injustice. These early moments of personally encountering or witnessing the oppression of others provided the first awareness of institutional and systemic inequities.

Another developmental phase was exposure to critical theories, most often during their doctoral programs, though for Sara this came earlier through her parents' influence. Critical frameworks gave DSTEs the language and conceptual tools to articulate experiences of oppression and analyze them in systemic terms. For those with earlier and more sustained exposure, such as Carl and Sara, this phase enabled a more refined and theory-driven understanding of justice. For others, like Maria and Molly, who encountered these frameworks later, conceptions were more grounded in experiential knowledge, shaped by lived teaching practice and personal reflection.

A third developmental phase involved social participation in communities of practice. Engaging with peers, mentors, students, and activist communities allowed DSTEs to test, extend, and reinterpret their perspectives. These social contexts functioned as communities of practice,

where shared dialogue and collective problem-solving made conceptions of social justice more robust and more connected to real-world teaching.

Finally, institutional tensions played a significant role. DSTE's repeatedly encountered contradictions between institutions' rhetorical commitments to justice and their actual practices. For example, witnessing superficial or unsupported "equity initiatives" led DSTE's to question not only how social justice was framed by teacher education programs, but also how institutions themselves perpetuated inequity. These moments of contradiction became sites of reflection that pushed DSTE's to sharpen their critical consciousness and redirect their justice efforts toward more action-oriented commitments.

These phases show that the timing of exposure to theory and the type of injustice experienced shaped both the depth and direction of DSTE's' conceptions. Those with early, sustained theoretical grounding (Carl, Sara) developed systemic and policy-level orientations, while those with later exposure (Maria, Molly) relied more heavily on lived experience. Likewise, the forms of oppression DSTE's encountered, linguistic marginalization for Sara, Maria, and Molly, and poverty and queer identity for Carl, directly influenced which aspects of justice they prioritized in their teaching.

In summary, DSTE's' conceptions of social justice were not fixed. They shifted over time through moments of conflict, agreement, and reflection. Personal background, exposure to theory, social participation, and institutional tensions all worked together to shape how they understood and approached social justice. In the following section, I consider how these conceptions enacted, or at times struggled to enact, in their teaching practices.

Research Question 3: Social Justice Enacting in Teaching Practices

The third research question of this study focuses on how DSTEs' conceptions of social justice enacted in their teaching practice:

RQ3: How, if at all, do the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enact in their teaching practice when teaching teachers?

To answer this research question, I used the concept of reification – where you give form to your experiences through “...abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts...” (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). I used interviews, classroom artifacts, and observation data to reveal DSTEs' reifications of their conceptions of social justice. I analyzed each case individually using within-case analysis (Yin, 1999). For each case, I provide a summary of their conceptions of social justice, a short description of the course they taught, and a description of how their conceptions enacted in their teaching practice. After discussing each case separately, I identified two themes from the data through cross-case analysis (Creswell et al., 2007). I present the themes here:

Theme 1: DSTEs enacted teaching practices that reflected, though unevenly, their evolving conceptions of social justice.

Theme 2: Institutional conditions created tensions that both enabled and constrained the alignment between DSTEs' conceptions of social justice and teaching practices.

I want to emphasize that while institutional tensions functioned as generative forces that developed DSTEs' conceptions of social justice, these same tensions also reappeared as constraints when DSTEs attempted to enact their conceptions of social justice in practice. The tensions around social justice that DSTEs discussed in research question 2 became constraints to enacting practice in research question 3. The dialectic nature of these tensions is important to consider when discussing DSTE development: institutional contradictions simultaneously cultivated critical conceptions and imposed limits on practice, underscoring how DSTEs' social

justice conceptions enact in the university classroom. In the next section, I present the findings for each participant and the two themes.

Carl

Carl's conceptions of social justice included all of Gorski's (2009) critical conceptions of social justice (see Table 24.). He emphasized the need for teachers to expand their understanding of social justice so that they recognize the institutional role in oppression and develop the connection between broader societal injustices and those injustices seen in schools. Through this expanded understanding, he desired teachers to become change agents, capable of transforming education to counter injustices. Furthermore, Carl noted the importance of humanizing pedagogy and the pursuit of joy to achieving social justice. Given Carl's conceptions of social justice, an enactment of his conceptions in practice would include a focus on developing his students' criticality, consideration of oppression in the larger context, engagement in critical theories, and preparing teachers to resist oppression through resistance pedagogy. Despite a strong connection between Carl's conceptions and his teaching practices, he still faced barriers to enacting social justice in his course: including struggling with financial stability due to the low stipend he received from the university and a lack of institutional support to implement more transformative, justice-centered pedagogies. The structural constraints of his role, such as limited autonomy over course design, time constraints, and an unsupportive departmental culture, limited his ability to fully align his pedagogy with his critical conceptions of social justice

Table 24. Carl's enactment of social justice conceptions in practice

Conceptions	Practices
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context	
Critical Analysis at Systemic Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraged critical consciousness and systemic analysis of oppression. -Contextualized class with local problems (school budget project)

Consideration of Larger Sociopolitical Context	-Connected school injustices with broader societal injustices with content covered. -Students completed project called the opportunity study that focused on economic differences between schools.
Engagement of Critical Theories	- Broad range of critical theories in readings and discussions - Created humanizing spaces where teachers and students feel valued. - Students engaged in critical reflections.
Teaching as Resistance Counter-Hegemonic Practice	
Commitment to Resistance and Counter-Hegemony	-Discussed community organizing and encouraged students to propose practical solutions to address injustices.
Application of Critical Consciousness	-Attempted to engage in approximations of practice related to critical consciousness.
Social Reconstruction as an Explicit Goal	-Stated that goal of the course was to fix societal problems.

Course Description: Carl taught a foundation of education course in the Fall 2024. His students were a mix of future teachers and the general study body taking the course for general education credit. The class met twice weekly - Tuesday and Thursday from 2:00pm to 3:15pm. The course description in Carl's syllabus was as follows:

This course explores the social context of education and how conflicts over philosophies, values, and goals are reflected in educational institutions in our pluralistic society. This course will help teachers and community members become reflective, critical thinkers about the social and philosophical issues they face and the choices they make. This course is designed through a critical social justice lens. It critiques how schools maintain inequality by perpetuating systems of oppression (e.g., racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) that negatively impact the lives of students, teachers, and communities. This course also highlights how solidarity efforts like community organizing and culturally sustaining pedagogies can leverage collective power to create thriving, equitable educational environments for all people (Carl, Syllabus)

Autonomy of Course Content and Practices: It should be noted that Carl had full autonomy over his course. While he did inherit the syllabus and thus course goals and content from another DSTE, he was able to remove readings, add readings, and create activities that he determined fit with his critical goals for the course.

Descriptions of the Classroom: Carl's classroom was arranged like a church, with a long center aisle with rectangular tables on either side. Each table sat four students – around 30 total - facing

a large projection screen at the front. Carl stood near the projection screen, his slides titled “Maryland School Funding and Educational Equity.” He greeted each student by name as they trickled in, smiling and making small talk. The class began with a quick check-in, then shifted into an activity where students simulated cutting 15% from a fictional school budget. They leaned across tables and debated about what counts as “essential”. Carl circulated between groups, crouching beside students to ask, “Who gets hurt when we say we’re cutting equitably?” The desks and PowerPoint slides made the space look like any other university classroom. However, Carl made efforts to get to know his students and tried to create opportunities for them to work together on real-world injustices. In the next section, I discuss in further detail how Carl’s conceptions were enacted through his teaching practices. *Critical Analysis of Education Policy and Practice*: Carl’s conceptions enacted in his course goals and practices. When asked about the goals for teachers in his class, Carl stated that he wanted to “help (teachers) to reframe their thinking so that they can start to approach issues of justice more systematically, institutionally, and structurally rather than just individually” (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24). Carl detailed this conception of social justice in the learning outcomes of his syllabus:

- Critically examine the historical examples of education in the United States and its intersection with social, political, and economic changes.
- Explore and critique how educational policies and practices affect marginalized communities, emphasizing the role of power, race, and class.
- Critically reflect on your assumptions, beliefs, and experiences related to education, considering how these factors shape your understanding of the role of schooling in society.

(Carl, Syllabus, Fall 2024)

Carl’s learning outcomes for his teachers focused on developing their critical analysis abilities. He wanted them to be able to critically examine, explore, and reflect on the injustices that are occurring in schools.

Carl included activities and projects in his teaching that aimed to facilitate the development of students' critical analysis abilities. He provided teachers with contextualized background knowledge on the injustices in their community. He then had them use this knowledge to "jump into their problem-solving mode or their critical conversation mode with their classmates" (Carl, Interview 3, 11.20.24) For example, during an observation, I saw him present the students with a project about school funding where students had to make decisions about what to cut from a school budget. Carl assigned the students different budgets based on where the school was located. This difference in budgeting highlighted the disparities in fundings between schools based on where they were located. He used schools in the surrounding counties - schools most of the teachers would be teaching in after they graduated - to show injustices were not just theoretical, but tangible and connected to them. This activity asked students to think critically about "what informs decisions when cutting budgets for essential programs?" (Observation 1, Carl, 10.24.24) After the activity was completed, Carl presented the teachers with a newspaper article that highlighted the need to increase school funding as well as redistribute funding. Carl's activities in class were aimed at building his students' capabilities at critically analyzing education.

Consideration of Analysis in Larger Sociopolitical Context: Carl included the connection between school injustices and the larger sociopolitical context in his course goals and practices. Carl wanted his students to understand how the injustices in schools are connected to broader societal injustices. In a survey question on the goals for his teachers, Carl stated that he wanted his teachers to:

understand that there are mechanisms of inequality that exist 'outside of school' which are actually incredibly consequential to the way U.S. society designs schools, runs schools, and allocates resources to schools (Carl, Survey, 10.1.24)

Carl's syllabus (refined by him) echoed this conception of social justice:

This course is designed through a critical social justice lens. It critiques how schools maintain inequality by perpetuating systems of oppression (e.g., racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) that negatively impact the lives of students, teachers, and communities (Carl, Syllabus)

Carl assigned his students to complete an opportunity study, which is an analysis of the contextual, institutional, and pedagogical conditions that enable—or constrain—a student's educational experience. Students were required to use the Mobility Outcome tool from the Opportunity Atlas – a tool that shows detailed economic data for different neighborhoods around the United States. Students were required to choose one geographic area to analyze and uncover patterns of inequality. Students then assessed how different social groups experienced education injustices and provided suggestions for how they might counter those injustices. Carl wanted his students to consider the connection between broader societal injustices and those in schools.

Engagement of Critical Theories: Carl's syllabus was filled with critical scholars and theories.

These critical theories included:

- Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1998)
 - Defining Racism and Identity Development (Tatum, 2017)
 - Transformative Justice (Brown, 2020)
 - Segrenomics and the History of Urban Education (Rooks, 2017)
 - Educational Survival and Abolitionist Teaching (Love, 2019)
 - Hidden Curriculum and Social Class in Education (Anyon, 1980)
 - The Purpose of Education and Credentialism (Labaree, 1999)
 - School Reform and Educational Equity (Noguera & Syeed, 2020)
- (Carl, Syllabus)

Carl assigned readings on each of these theorists. He also used critical theories when designing the practices in his classroom. Carl he asked students to “wrestle with questions” and go through a Socratic seminar approach to build their ideas around social justice rather than just tell them what social justice was (Carl, Interview 3, 11.20.24) Carl also had his students perform content reflections throughout the semester. These reflections focused on different readings and

discussions from the course. Carl wanted to help his students to build their critical consciousness by engaging in reflections. This process aligned with his goal of having students become “reflective, critical thinkers about the social and philosophical issues they face and the choices they make” (Carl, Syllabus).

Carl also modeled critical theories through a humanizing approach (Freire, 1970) to teaching. He wanted to create a class where teachers felt seen and appreciated (Carl, Survey). Carl emphasized building a community where people and students saw each not just as learners, but also as people and as friends (Carl, Focus Group Interview, 10.17.24) In an effort to develop this community, Carl started every class with a community check-in:

Every class, pretty much every class, starts with a community check-in question as well as a community connection. So the check-in question has nothing to do with education. Typically, it's just getting to know more about who they are as people and about their lives, and then the community connection is either something that I share about my life that I feel is important for them to know (Carl, Interview 3, 11.20.24)

Carl treated his students as people and saw the importance of getting to know them. I saw this during one of my observations where Carl checked in with the students in his class through a Roses and Thorns activity – students shared their roses (what is going well) and thorns (what isn't going well). Students shared with those sitting next to them, then shared with the whole class. Carl also shared his own stories from school – using personal anecdotes to model vulnerability (Observation 1, Carl, 10.24.24). This approach to teaching shows that Carl's conceptions of humanizing pedagogy were enacting in his classroom practices because he prioritized authentic relationships, created space for emotional expression, and modeled vulnerability. These are core elements of a humanizing approach that centers students' full humanity as essential to the learning process. By engaging in practices like Roses and Thorns

and sharing his own stories, Carl disrupted hierarchical norms in the classroom and cultivated a learning environment built on mutual respect, empathy, and shared experience.

Commitment to Resistance and Counter-Hegemony: Carl's conceptions of social justice included preparing teachers to resist oppression and become student and family advocates. This connection was made clear in his syllabus where he stated that the "solidarity efforts like community organizing and culturally sustaining pedagogies can leverage collective power to create thriving, equitable educational environments for all people" (Carl, Syllabus). Using collective power to counter injustices of institutions was an important theme in Carl's course. He included readings about an abolitionist organizer, Adrian Marie Brown, to help students to think about how to tear down unjust systems as well as how to then build them back up again (Carl, Interview 3, 11.20.24). Carl's conceptions on resistance enacted in his teaching practices.

Application of Critical Consciousness: According to Gorski (2009), critical consciousness involves recognizing systemic oppression and acting to challenge it. He wanted his teachers to think of themselves as community organizers and change agents. Carl wrote about the goals for his students in the survey:

Critical consciousness and organizing skills necessary to build solidarity with students and families in a way that allows them to leverage their collective power to advocate for policy changes that are making my grand idea of school transformation possible. I believe that teaching is an inherently political act and I want teachers to see how their role is part of a growing activist or organizing (Carl, survey)

Despite stating these goals in the survey, Carl was unable to implement them consistently in practice. As a DSTE with limited authority over curriculum and program structures, he lacked the autonomy to design experiences that would fully prepare preservice teachers as community activists. Instead, he attempted what Grossman et al. (2009) describe as "approximations of practice" - opportunities for novices to engage in practices that are proximal to the practices of a

profession (p. 2056). For Carl, these approximations included a school budget simulation and opportunity study (discussed earlier). These activities focused on activism and systemic critique but remained bounded by programmatic expectations and lacked direct engagement with community-based organizing. Carl was adamant that learning and the community should be connected, he called for learning to be “community mediated” (Carl, Interview 3, 11.20.24). This misalignment between his activist vision of community mediated learning and the institutional constrictions led to tensions around enacting critical consciousness in his classroom (discussed in the “institutional tensions” section).

Social Reconstruction as an Explicit Goal: Carl framed his course projects to be about fixing problems and building back better than before. During my second observation of Carl, I saw how he was encouraging his students to think about the local practical impact of social justice when discussing a school budgeting project (Carl, Observation 2, 11.7.24). He wanted students to start to think in practical terms about how you fund a school and what decisions you would make to try and reduce injustices in the school given limited resources. Carl had a strong connection between his conceptions of social justice and his teaching practices. However, he still faced tensions when attempting to teach in a social justice-oriented way.

Institutional Tensions: Carl enacted his conceptions of social justice in his teaching practices. One of the reasons that Carl was able to teach with alignment between his conceptions was that the teacher education program left him to his own devices with choosing what and how to teach his course. He was given a syllabus, but he had a lot of flexibility with what to focus on, what to remove, and how to teach the course content. When asked if a faculty member had inquired about the course, Carl stated that the only time that the teacher education program would consider looking at a course is if there were complaints from students (Carl, Interview 3,

11.20.24) Given that Carl had no complaints, he was left to himself to develop and shape his course to how he wanted to teach it. This freedom to choose course activities and content increased the alignment between Carl's conceptions of social justice and his teaching practices. Without oversight from the teacher education program, he was free to teach how he wanted.

Despite the benefits of freedom, Carl still wished that he could have had more institutional support. However, Carl did not believe that the teacher education program had the capacity to support teacher educators:

I don't think the University has developed the capacity to institutionalize that process [supporting social justice teaching], to know what exactly is happening in courses and how to support teachers who want to implement that [social justice] across an entire program, while also giving teachers the flexibility to adapt to the needs of their students (Carl, Interview 3, 11.20.24)

Carl believed that observations would help him to strengthen his reflection and development. Observations would support DSTE critical reflection and foster their development further through social participation. Without observations, Carl doubted himself at times, understanding that he was a 'good' teacher educator, but unsure of whether he could do more.

Carl's programmatic freedom to alter the course to meet his conceptions of social justice meant that he was spending a lot of time and energy on the course. During this time, he was dealing with economic stressors from the lack of funding he received from the university. He would regularly have to skip meals to save money (Carl, Interview 2, 10.23.24). The dehumanizing nature of the university was reflected in its failure to provide livable compensation, recognition, or formal support for DSTEs.

Carl's experience exemplified a paradox: programmatic freedom enabled him to enact his social justice commitments, but the lack of material and institutional support undermined his capacity to sustain them. While he worked to humanize his classroom, the university

dehumanized him through low compensation, lack of recognition, and absence of formal support. This tension illustrates how structural inequities in higher education can erode educators' ability to fully realize their pedagogical commitments to social justice.

Summary: Carl demonstrated a strong alignment between his conceptions of social justice and teaching practices. However, his efforts also revealed the tensions involved with teaching social justice as a DSTE. Carl's freedom to design his course allowed him to align his teaching with his social justice conceptions, but the absence of institutional support left him doubting his effectiveness. At the same time, low pay and lack of recognition dehumanized him, creating a paradox where programmatic freedom enabled social justice teaching, yet structural inequities undermined his capacity to sustain it.

Molly

Molly's conceptions of social justice included: 1) critical analysis of education policy and practice and 2) engagement of critical theories (Gorski, 2009). Molly recognized that injustices were not just personal, but structural. She also emphasized the importance of taking a humanizing approach to teaching. Molly's conceptions of social justice involved principles of humanizing pedagogy – treating students as people and student driven learning. These concepts enacted in how she approached teaching, not in the content she was teaching. Despite being able to enact her conceptions of social justice in how she taught, she still faced institutional tensions that restricted her implementation of her teaching.

Table 25. Molly's enactment of social justice conceptions in practice

Conceptions	Practices
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context	
Critical Analysis at Systemic Level	-Focused on students critically consuming research and questioning how research is published and consumed.
Engagement of Critical Theories	- Humanizing pedagogy:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focused on student-centered learning, prioritizing student perspectives. -Allowed students to take control of their own learning experiences.
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Course Description: Molly taught a research methodologies course. This is a master's level course, and her students were in-service teachers. The class met once weekly - Thursday from 4:00pm to 7:15pm. The course description:

A core requirement for all students in the TLPL Master of Arts program, this course provides an introduction to methodological approaches commonly used in educational research (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches) with a focus on addressing issues in teaching and learning, schools and communities, and educational policy. In this course, students will develop their own research competencies to become knowledgeable consumers of research and develop research questions. Students will learn the research paradigms and assumptions of diverse methodological approaches and their implications for implementation. Students will also learn the relationship between research questions and methods, and the relevance of the former as the guiding aspect in every research process. Overall, this course also affords opportunities for students to explore diverse methodological approaches to their particular interests and examine critically how educational research is implemented (Molly, Syllabus)

Autonomy of Course Content and Practices: Molly was able to decide how the content of the course was taught, but she did not feel comfortable with changing the content and projects of the course as she saw the course as an important first course for the Masters students.

Description of the Classroom: Around a dozen master's students sat at individual desks facing forward toward a projector screen with laptops open. Molly stood at the front, her slides outlining the day's discussion on Phenomenology and Positionality. As students arrived, she greeted each one by name, asking how their week had gone or joking about the day's chaos in local schools. The lesson began with a warmup activity to build community. Students enjoyed sharing their favorite breakfast cereal with one another and the atmosphere of the room was positive, with smiles and laughter. When the discussion on positionality began, students talked openly about bias, insider status, and the challenge of naming themselves in research. Molly listened closely, then leaned forward to ask, "Can we ever really separate who we are from what

we study?” The room itself looks like many other university classrooms with rows of desks, a PowerPoint, an instructor at the front, but Molly’s approach was personal and inviting. She focused on making sure that learning unfolded through shared reflection. In the following section, I will discuss how Molly’s conceptions of social justice were enacted in her teaching practices.

Critical Analysis of Education Policy and Practice: Molly’s conceptions of social justice included the critical analysis of institutional injustices. These conceptions enacted in her course through a focus on the critical consumption of research and questioning of the research process. However, they were not the main goal of the course, which was for students to develop an understanding of the very basic methodologies that are utilized in educational research (Molly, Interview 3,11.20.24) As a secondary goal, Molly wanted her students to be able to read and critically consume educational research (Molly, Interview 3,11.20.24) One of the research processes that she had her students critique was how research is published:

The question I always ask myself when a researcher isn’t sharing information, is it because they didn’t think about it, or didn’t think they have to - both problematic. One is a privilege that they don’t need to, and the other a willful ignorance - intentionally not include. Can you know their mind? No. Make your personal bias known. (Molly, Observation 1, 10.24.24)

Molly’s conceptions of social justice did enact in aspects of her course, but given the research methods focus of the course, it was difficult for them to be visible. Of the 13 weeks of the course, two focused on critical topics: 1) critical and action research and 2) ethics and equity. Molly did not focus explicitly on social justice, but discussion of social justice arose naturally as many of the students chose critical topics for their research project (Molly, Interview 3,11.20.24)

Molly had one project related to critical consumption of research. She assigned students a research paper critique which required students to choose a research paper and write a 1–2-page

critique. The critique had to include points of agreement, disagreements, evidence used, and areas for improvement. Molly highlighted the need for students in her course to develop their critical thinking. When asked if the social justice focus of her students' research paper was planned by her she stated that it was not something that she had pushed, but a result of her students' interest in social justice.

Engagement of Critical Theories: Molly's conceptions of social justice involved principles of humanizing pedagogy – including her approaches to treating students as people and using student-driven learning. Molly did not directly quote critical theories when discussing her conceptions of social justice and she did not quote them when discussing her course. However, she did adopt practices that mirror principles of humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1970), including: 1) community building 2) treating students as whole people and 3) dialogue focused practices. Molly's conceptions of social justice did enact with her teaching. I describe these in detail below.

Molly's practices focused on building community in the classroom. "I always make a strong effort to create a classroom environment where conversation is clearly welcome. You know, I always set up very intentional time for, like, a lengthy check-in. And I, you know, I make time for mental health breaks." (Molly, Interview 3, 11.20.24) During observations, she used a number of approaches to facilitate community in the classroom including 1) a fun check-in, such as what is your favorite cereal 2) sharing personal stories, including her trip to visit a friend over the weekend (Observation 2, Molly, 11.7.24) and 3) pausing to give space for people to share their voice, for instance when she creates time for her students to share their own personal stories (Molly, Observation 1, 10.24.24)

For Molly, developing the classroom community involved structuring how discussions happened in class:

If I want people to be emotionally available and talk about difficult things, then it is hard if they feel like they have to defend themselves, right? It has to come from a place of wanting to share, not wanting to protect, and so in order to do that, I have to be the one to protect them. (Molly, Interview 3, 11.20.24)

Molly was concerned about the equity of voice in her classroom – ensuring that all of her students had the opportunity to speak. She wanted her students to be able to share their ideas and beliefs without being attacked. She spent time setting up a classroom where it was okay to disagree and modelled what it sounded like to be respectful when disagreeing (Molly, Observation 1, 10.24.24).

Molly also made sure to treat her students as people – humanizing them. She was sure to think about their needs as people, including the need for 1) breaks 2) extensions 3) consideration of reasonable assignments that do not take too long. Molly focused on the importance of taking a break, understanding that during such a long class period (3hrs 15mins), no one can pay attention the entire time (Molly, Interview 3, 11.20.24) Molly wrestled with extension requests – as a former teacher, she understood how busy her students were. However, she worried that she was doing them a disservice by not holding them accountable to the timeframe in which something was due (Molly, Interview 3, 11.20.24) Determining how much classwork to assign was a point of stress for Molly as she did not want to overburden her students (Molly, Interview 3, 11.7.24). This consideration of student needs shows that Molly was treating her students as people.

Molly also used dialogue in her practice. Dialogue is an important part of Freire's (1970) humanizing pedagogy because it goes against the idea of banking model of education where a teacher lectures. Here, Molly encouraged her students to learn through discussion. In an observation of her class, I noted how the course was built around questioning:

Molly had her students wrestle with research studies and what it means if research isn't sharing certain information with the consumer. As it was a smaller class (often around 9

students in person) the group was able to discuss back and forth together (Field notes from Molly, Observation 1)

Molly's conceptions of social justice involved principles of humanizing pedagogy – treating students as people and student driven learning. These concepts enacted in how she approached teaching, not in the content she was teaching.

Institutional Tensions: The institutional tensions that Molly experienced related to teaching included a lack of opportunities for collaboration. Molly had few opportunities for collaboration when planning for the course. She stated that if she had a TA she would have co-planned with them (Molly, Interview 3, 11.7.24) Instead, her planning was based on her student needs and done alone (Molly, Interview 3, 11.7.24). This struggle to collaborate and get help from others appeared to be due to hesitance to 'bother' teacher educators for advice. Molly's syllabus was created through discussions with faculty; therefore, the course content was shaped by faculty. She did not continue these discussions during the semester despite having concerns and questions about the course. She felt hesitant to seek advice from those faculty members because she did not want to bother them. She stated that she only "bothered" one of them once (Molly, Interview 3, 11.7.24) Molly's view of talking with faculty as "bothering" them shows that she likely believes faculty to prioritize other elements of their work. Whether this belief is perceived or real, the result was Molly relying on herself to teach the course. This isolated situation was interesting as Molly did use faculty content experts to come into her class and discuss research methods with her students.

When asked how the teacher education program could support teacher education – Molly suggested the need for a better connection between advisors and students. She noted that her friend quit the doctoral program because of a poor relationship with her advisor (Molly, Interview 3, 11.7.24). She noted that she was lucky to have such a good advisor, but not all

students had that. She recognized the importance of the doctoral student – faculty relationship, but described that relationship as one that did not appear to revolve around pedagogical decision making.

Summary: Molly's freedom to shape her teaching allowed her to enact her social justice commitments through humanizing, student-centered practices (community check-ins, fostering equity of voice, treating students as whole people). Yet this autonomy was paired with limited institutional support: she planned her course alone, avoided seeking faculty input, and received little pedagogical guidance from advising. The tension was that while her independence enabled alignment with her conceptions of social justice, the lack of collaboration and feedback made her practices difficult to sustain, and the constraints of teaching a methods course without pedagogical guidance limited the depth to which she could extend them.

Sara and Maria

Sara and Maria's conceptions of social justice aligned with Gorski's (2009) critical conceptions of social justice. They both emphasized the need for teachers to critically analyze institutional roles in oppression and the role of critical theory for guiding social justice pedagogy. Their conceptions varied as to which critical theorists they highlighted, and the type of resistance needed to counter oppression. Due to the class being cotaught, I grouped their conceptions and teaching practices together and treated them as a single case for research question 3. Sara and Maria's conceptions of social justice enacted in their teaching practice, but the extent of that enactment was restricted by barriers. These barriers included the amount of content to cover, time available to refine the course, student resistance, and a theory-practice divide. These barriers restricted Sara and Maria's ability to prepare teachers to resist oppression and the course time spent on social justice was reduced.

Table 26. Sara and Maria's enactment of social justice conceptions in practice

Conceptions	Practices
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context	
Critical Analysis at Systemic Level	-Reflection -Stories of injustice -Building empathy
Consideration of Larger Sociopolitical Context	-Connected linguistic injustices to the actions of the dominant culture -Had students think about the broader purpose of education outside school
Engagement of Critical Theories	- Humanizing Pedagogy including community building - -Translanguaging
Teaching as Resistance Counter-Hegemonic Practice	
Prepare teachers and students to resist oppression	-Trying to develop students as advocates for multilingual learners

Course Description: Sara and Maria co-taught a foundations of literacy and biliteracy development course. This course included future teachers and the general student body. They met twice weekly Monday and Wednesday, 12:30pm to 1:45pm. The course description:

This course presents an overview of the research on literacy and biliteracy development for culturally and linguistically diverse English learners/multilingual learners (MLs). The course explores the theoretical models and processes of teaching reading and writing, current literacy/biliteracy issues, assessment, and strategies for developing literacy and biliteracy skills for MLLs.

Autonomy of Course Content and Practices: It should be noted that Sara and Maria had full autonomy over their course. They did inherit the syllabus from a faculty member who was not justice oriented. They were given the syllabus close to the start of the semester and did not have a lot of time to alter the course to align with their social justice conceptions. However, they did have flexibility in that they were able to make changes without oversight from faculty.

Description of the Classroom Space: The classroom was set up with around 30 individual desks facing a large projection screen. Around 20 of the desks were filled with mostly women, making small talk before the class began. Sara and Maria stood by the door of the class, greeting each student by name as they entered, exchanging brief smiles and check-ins that made the large space

feel personal and grounded. Maria invited students to share their earliest memories of writing, an exercise that fills the room with recollections of journals, family letters, and classroom frustrations. “There’s so much power in writing your own story,” she reminded them, connecting their reflections to questions of privilege and language. When Sara joined in the conversation, she moved among the desks, switching between English and Spanish as she introduced a writing task meant to evoke empathy through linguistic discomfort. Students wrote, laughed, and struggled. The whole group then unpacked how it felt to be “on the outside.” The classroom looked like many other university classrooms, with rows of desks and a PowerPoint at the front. However, Maria and Sara’s approach worked to try and transform it into a space where the classroom could act as a community trying to develop their understanding of language and literacy. In the following section, I will discuss how Sara and Maria’s enacted their conceptions of social justice in their teaching practices.

Critical Analysis of Education Policy and Practice: Sara and Maria’s conceptions of critical analysis enacted in their course goals and practices. Sara and Maria’s personal experiences with institutional injustices shaped their focus on the need to address it, particularly regarding linguistic injustice. To develop their students’ criticality, they asked students to reflect, listen to stories of injustice, and build their empathy. Sara and Maria used critical reflection in their course to have their students recognize the impact of injustices. They had their students reflect on their dominant culture and patterns of behavior through a reflection activity. When both Sara and Maria had to attend a conference, they required students to do some deep reading and deep reflection on translanguaging articles, lesson studies, and videos (Maria, Interview 3). Reflection is an important aspect of critical theory. Freire (1970) encouraged reflection as part of a process of praxis. Cycles of reflection and action upon the world to help transform it (Freire, 1970).

Here, Sara and Maria were having their students go through the process of reflection to develop their criticality.

Sara and Maria used storytelling about themselves – sharing personal anecdotes - to “open up space for critical conversations” (Sara, Interview 3). Both were multilingual learners who experienced oppression in schools growing up. Therefore, their personal stories as a child and as a teacher were valuable to help their students to begin to think critically about the oppression that can happen to multilingual learners. For example, Sara shared her experiences in school where she suffered from depression:

‘Let me tell you about me. I was president of the Bulimic Club in high school because I felt voiceless at 15, and I almost dropped out. If I had been in a translanguaging space, that would have been really different for me’ (Sara, Interview 3)

Storytelling is an important part of critical theory as it can be used to reveal counter-narratives and describe how oppression operated. Here, Sara and Maria helped to make the injustices that multilingual learners face more concrete for their students.

Sara and Maria also tried to build their students’ empathy toward multilingual learners, recognizing that fostering critical awareness required more than just delivering content, but also engaging students emotionally and experientially. They believed that increasing students’ empathy could help those who had not experienced linguistic injustice begin to understand the emotional and cognitive toll of navigating schooling in a language not their own. To do this, they incorporated purposeful activities such as speaking to their students in Spanish and asking them to write in Spanish, even when many had little or no prior knowledge of the language. These activities were not intended to teach Spanish, but rather to evoke discomfort, frustration, and vulnerability, the feelings that mirror what multilingual learners often experience in English-dominant classrooms. Sara explained that these moments helped students begin to understand

what it feels like to “be voiceless because of the predominance of English and immigration journeys” (Sara, Interview 3).

In addition to these experiential tasks, both instructors shared personal and community stories of linguistic marginalization, using narrative as a pedagogical tool to deepen students’ emotional engagement. The combination of storytelling and language-based activities was intentionally designed to foster *critical empathy*, a form of empathy that not only acknowledges others’ struggles but connects them to broader systems of power and inequality. In this way, Sara and Maria’s conceptions of social justice were not only theoretical but deeply embedded in their pedagogy. Their goal for the course was to provide students with “tools to be critical” and to “push students toward criticality without shutting them down” (Sara, Interview 3). Their teaching reflects an intentional balance between emotional connection and structural critique, guiding students to move beyond sympathy and toward a justice-oriented understanding of language, power, and inclusion.

Consideration of Analysis in Larger Sociopolitical Context: Sara connected the educational injustices of multilingual immigrants to the injustices they face in broader society. Maria and Sara’s conceptions related to the larger sociopolitical context enacted themselves in their teaching, as they wanted their students to think about the broader purposes of literacy. By having their students begin to think about literacy outside of school, they could begin to connect the injustices within schools to broader societal injustices. One connection that Sara and Maria emphasized was that language and power, and language and race were interconnected (Maria, Interview 3). They also emphasized the need for their students to think about the purpose of literacy and how it is used to make meaning in the world and change the world:

We know phonemic awareness is important. Phonics is important. Vocabulary, comprehension—all of these are important. But they have to come together. The end goal

of reading and writing is making meaning and changing the world. We focus a lot on that—on ensuring that everything has meaning and is connected (Maria, Interview 3)

Maria and Sara wanted their students to consider the connection between linguistic injustices in schools and linguistic injustices in the broader society. They did this through discussions of how language connects to broader societal issues, such as power and race.

Engagement of Humanizing Pedagogy: Sara and Maria engaged with critical theories when defining their social justice conceptions. They associated social justice with humanization, funds of knowledge, liberation, critical consciousness, and praxis. They enacted these concepts during their teaching through community building and trying to model for their students what humanizing pedagogy looks like. One lesson they modeled during community building was treating students as a whole person:

Everything starts with getting to know your students and knowing them as whole human beings, right? We always message: You're teaching the whole human - their story, their cultural background, their transition, their immigration journey. That needs to be part of your thinking. (Sara, Interview 3)

Here Sara and Maria discussed the importance of teaching the 'whole human.' Their classroom goal was to build a community by modeling how to treat students as individual people with their own unique personality and needs. They used a beginning of the year survey to get to know their students' "interests, intentions, and preferences better so we could create a more welcoming classroom community" (Maria, Interview 3). They also began every class with a check-in to create community. The check-in activity varied, sometimes introducing a topic, but often focused on how people were doing emotionally. They were able to create a space where students felt comfortable enough to have "real conversations and be critical about the things we know" (Maria, Interview 3). Dialogue is an important part of learning in critical theory (Freire, 1970).

Building a community where there is trust between members can facilitate dialogue. Sara and Maria's conceptions of humanizing pedagogy enacted through building a classroom community.

Resistance Pedagogy – Preparing Teachers to Resist Oppression

When I hear “social justice”, I think of liberatory perspectives that emphasize the empowerment of marginalized communities (and their allies), who use their collective power to advocate for rights, sovereignty, and humanity. It's about recognizing and dismantling oppressive systems, creating equitable spaces, and ensuring everyone has access to resources, opportunities, and a voice in decisions (Sara, Survey, 10.1.24)

Sara's conceptions of social justice had a strong focus on resistance pedagogy. Maria wanted teachers to become advocates for multilingual learners whereas Sara focused more on the process of using collective power to transform education in a way that dismantles oppressive systems.

In their course, Sara and Maria wanted their students to become advocates for multilingual learners. However, their teaching practices were constrained by the institutional tensions they faced.

Institutional Tensions: Sara and Maria had autonomy to shape their course, which gave them the opportunity to integrate social justice practices; however, they faced tension from the structural and practical tensions: including content overload, limited planning time, student pushback, lack of reading engagement, and the theory–practice divide. These tensions constrained the sustainability of their efforts and reduced the depth with which their social justice conceptions could enact in practice.

A constraint to Sara and Maria including conceptions of social justice into their course was what they described as an overwhelming amount of content to address. The students were expected to learn literacy methods, bilingual literacy methods, and socially just approaches simultaneously, leading to content overload:

Translanguaging—I could teach a semester on reading. So there was a lot of writing, a lot of focus, and yesterday was the perfect example. We had four activities and no time for what we had envisioned (Maria, Interview 3)

Course standards were aimed at students learning literacy teaching methods as well as specific teaching methods for ESOL. These were the course goals listed on the syllabus:

1. Describe the interactive nature of the reading process and explain how this process may differ for English learners
 2. Use a variety of strategies to help students develop intrinsic motivation for reading
 3. Explain the relationship between vocabulary and concept development in student learning
 4. Design strategic instruction using appropriate reading materials to achieve content area goals
 5. Facilitate appropriate learning experiences for students with various reading abilities by utilizing a variety of texts and approaches, including technology
 6. Use formal and informal writing strategies to facilitate student learning across content areas
 7. Incorporate methods in the content areas to address the diverse backgrounds of their students including culture, language (dialect and ESOL), alternative abilities, and giftedness
 8. Use a variety of methods of assessing content area literacy to plan instruction and communicate with students, parents, and allied professionals
- (Maria & Sara, Syllabus)

Maria and Sara recognized that this was too much for students and found it difficult to achieve these goals and include their social justice efforts at the same time. The result was students failing to grasp some of the key concepts:

One of the projects was making a brochure for a student moving to the country about their school. That should have been an instant decision—‘This should be a bilingual brochure.’ But no, they still aren’t there yet, even after we just covered translanguaging. That’s what I’m saying—I feel like we’re providing so much content and space for these conversations to happen, but in my opinion, it’s too much at once (Maria, Interview 3)

Sara and Maria’s struggle with content overload was exasperated by their second constraint: a lack of preparation time for the course. They were given the course syllabus very close to the start of the semester, so they only had a couple of weeks to alter course readings, PowerPoint slides, content, and projects before they needed to send it to the students (Maria &

Sara, Interview 3). Without sufficient time, they were not able to shape the course towards their preferred criticality level. Furthermore, they were always playing catchup with the course content:

We didn't have time to do all the readings before class, so we were just a week ahead of our students in terms of assigned materials. Obviously, we know the content, but we kept revising the calendar and adjusting priorities. Most of the time, we were choosing one reading over another. We only added a couple of new ones from our own work because we just didn't have the time to do more (Maria, Interview 3)

Maria and Sara would have liked to have added more readings to their course, but they ran out of time during planning to research and find relevant literature. These struggles with time had a negative impact of their mental health as they struggled with guilt over their handling of the course:

I should have conferred with her more, but I didn't. And I felt guilty about that. We were at a conference together, having drinks, and I said, 'Maria, you need to stop. You cannot, as a Latina woman instructor, take on all this responsibility. We did the best we could. At some point, it's in their hands.' That's inequitable too—our guilt, our feeling that we should have prepared her better. But that's years of conditioning telling us that we are responsible for fixing everything (Sara, Interview 3)

Sara and Maria would have benefited from more time to shape the course and understand the readings. Always struggling with how much time to commit to the course was a stressor for them.

The third constraint, student pushback, also added to their stress. The students in their classroom had different experiences in terms of privilege, cultural border crossing, linguistic oppression, linguistic privilege (Maria & Sara, Interview 3). This variety of backgrounds was good for the classroom diversity, but many of the White students struggled with embodying what it meant to be from a non-dominant social class:

And I feel like our White students have grown a lot in their criticality, but they have a lot more to work on because they haven't embodied what happens when your culture is not

centered, when your language is not centered, when your body is not centered in the political context (Maria & Sara, Interview 3)

Here, Maria and Sara noted how their White students had grown in their criticality, but their ignorance around other cultures and languages wasn't easy to overcome. They did receive pushbacks from students when they provided feedback:

There was pushback because, you know, I just took a risk. Like, I didn't have to give her that feedback. I could have just graded based on the rubric. She would have gotten her B-minus. We didn't have to talk about it for an hour or more. But we did, because we're trying to be aligned to our values, right? We're trying to be aligned to the fact that everybody's touched by White supremacy (Maria & Sara, Interview 3)

Maria and Sara, when faced with students who inadvertently stated ideas of White supremacy, could have ignored them. Instead, they “took a risk” and spent their time and energy addressing them. While these efforts were beneficial to developing the criticality of their students, it was draining on their energy.

The fourth constraint was students not reading the assigned readings. Sara and Maria found that about half the class were not reading the assigned materials. This lack of reading restricted the course because Sara and Maria had to spend more of their class time on reading content, and less on activities that might develop their criticality:

Fifty percent of our students are not reading the assigned texts. Considering that reality and the fact that there was no formal accountability mechanism—no discussion or quiz—we had to adjust. We relied on jigsaw activities. Even if they hadn't read, they would still get exposure to the key ideas. Then, we structured activities around application—whether it was analyzing a video for key concepts or developing a vocabulary lesson in groups (Sara & Maria, Interview 3)

Sara and Maria stated during Interview 3 that there were times during the course when they had to directly address the students' responsibility to engage in their readings education:

You are all college students. You should be doing your readings. You should take this class seriously. You are doing a disservice to multilingual learners when you don't read. This isn't about me. It's not about your friend. It's about your future. It's about our

future. Multilingual learners deserve teachers who are prepared (Sara & Maria, Interview 3)

Spending time covering assigned readings during class meant that more in class time was spent on content development rather than practical application of the content.

The fifth barrier was the theory-practice divide. This divide is a common struggle in teacher education, where students are exposed to frameworks (theory) for how to teach, but struggle with real-world application (practice). In this course, Maria and Sara were trying to “plant the seeds” of practice:

Some of these seeds will start making more sense when they’re in practice. One of the things we mentioned was that it would have been great for this class to be taught while our students were actually in the classroom—student teaching or having some sort of real experience (Maria & Sara, Interview 3)

Despite the vast amount of content taught in the course, teachers were able to apply little of it in practice. Maria and Sara relied on modeling teaching approaches and having students write in lesson plans how they would teach.

Sara and Maria attempted to have their conceptions of social justice enact in their course. They challenged students to question privilege, used counter-storytelling to center marginalized experiences, and sought to develop praxis. However, the variety of institutional tensions and structural constraints to the course hindered them achieving a full realization of their vision. Their experience highlighted the emotional labor and resistance required to implement a social justice approach in teacher education. I end this section with a quote from Sara and Maria on the importance of making social justice practical:

We have to make social justice practical. It’s great to talk about, but people are dying. Unfortunately, families are being separated because of White supremacy. Students’ identities are being negated. That’s why it’s not enough to just have conversations about social justice, we have to act on it in real, tangible ways (Sara & Maria, Interview 3)

Summary: Sara and Maria's conceptions of social justice aligned with Gorski's (2009) critical conceptions, emphasizing systemic critique, resistance pedagogy, and humanizing approaches. In practice, they engaged students through reflection, counter-storytelling, empathy-building activities (storytelling about oppression, translanguaging tasks to evoke discomfort, community-building check-ins), and sought to prepare teachers as advocates for multilingual learners. Yet this work was constrained by institutional tensions (content overload, limited preparation time, student pushback, lack of reading engagement, and the theory–practice divide). The tension was that while their autonomy allowed them to integrate justice-oriented practices, the heavy workload and limited planning time made these efforts difficult to sustain, and student resistance, disengagement with readings, and the theory–practice gap reduced the depth with which they could embed critical pedagogy across the course.

Research Question 3: Cross-Case Analysis

Theme 1: Social Justice Conceptions Enacting in Teaching Practices

DSTEs enacted teaching practices that reflected, though unevenly, their evolving conceptions of social justice. Each DSTE implemented teaching practices that reflected their conceptions of social justice, demonstrating alignment between their theoretical understandings and their pedagogical approaches. These practices often centered on fostering critical consciousness, engaging with critical theories, situating learning in broader societal contexts, and promoting resistance and advocacy. Though the depth and focus of enactment varied across cases, all four DSTEs made intentional efforts to translate their social justice conceptions into classroom practice.

Critical Analysis and Reflective Practice: The most widespread and consistent practice across DSTEs was cultivating students' criticality through reflective exercises, dialogue, and exposure

to multiple perspectives. DSTEs designed their courses to prompt students to interrogate educational norms, question taken-for-granted assumptions, and examine their own positionalities. For instance, Molly regularly incorporated journaling and self-assessments that encouraged students to connect their lived experiences to structural inequities in education. Carl facilitated discussions in which students critically analyzed current events and school policies, helping them move beyond surface-level understandings of injustice. These practices align with Gorski's (2009) call for teacher educators to push students toward deeper analysis of the systemic nature of inequity, rather than offering simplified or depoliticized accounts of difference.

Engagement with Critical Theories: Another common thread was the explicit integration of critical theories—particularly critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995). DSTEs frequently grounded learning in dialogue, inquiry, and disruption of dominant narratives. Sara and Maria used counter-storytelling, inviting students to examine the lived realities of multilingual learners and immigrant communities as a means of cultivating empathy and awareness. Carl structured his class around essential questions and problem-based learning to foster what he called “radical curiosity” about systems of oppression. These strategies reflect core tenets of critical pedagogy, such as naming the world, humanization, and praxis. DSTEs positioned students not as passive recipients of knowledge but as co-constructors of meaning who must engage critically with theory and lived experience.

Consideration of Broader Societal Contexts: DSTEs consistently connected classroom learning to real-world injustices, situating educational issues within broader systems of power. They prompted students to analyze how racism, classism, linguistic marginalization, and xenophobia shape the everyday experiences of K-12 students and educators. For example, Carl asked his

students to map the relationship between school funding formulas and community wealth, while Maria designed lessons that explored the intersections between language policy, immigration, and identity. This societal framing aimed to help students move from individual empathy toward structural critique.

Resistance and Advocacy: All four DSTEs incorporated practices that encouraged their students to see themselves as agents of change. Sara and Maria emphasized the importance of linguistic justice and advocated for teachers to support and elevate multilingual learners in their future classrooms. They helped students see how language can be a tool of both empowerment and oppression and encouraged them to challenge English-only norms. Carl explicitly taught his students about resistance pedagogy, urging them to question institutional expectations that reproduce inequity and to imagine liberatory alternatives. However, the ability of DSTEs to fully engage in resistance teaching was often constrained by institutional factors, including rigid syllabi, lack of autonomy, and insufficient support, limited the extent to which they could center advocacy in their courses. This finding supports existing literature (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2010; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009) that suggests teacher educators' commitment to justice is often at odds with institutional norms and constraints.

Theme 2: Institutional Tensions

DSTEs faced multiple tensions as they attempted to implement their conceptions of social justice. The teacher education program (institution) provided stability and legitimacy but simultaneously reinforced limits on what was possible in practice. These dynamics surfaced in four tensions:

Institutional Culture vs. Critical Pedagogy: The culture of the teacher education program created predictable routines: pre-set syllabi, PowerPoint lectures, assigned readings, and classroom

activities like jigsaws and discussions. This “regime of competence” (Wenger, 1998) offered coherence and legitimacy but constrained DSTEs’ ability to depart from convention. Even across different courses, instruction followed a familiar structure shaped by student expectations, established norms of “old-timers” in the CoP, and physical classroom arrangements. Thus, institutional culture provided scaffolding while limiting enactment of social justice teaching practices.

Structural Coherence vs. Pedagogical Support: Pre-existing syllabi and course frameworks gave DSTEs structure for what to teach, but there was an absence of mentoring on how to teach. None of the DSTEs reported formal observations, collaborative planning, or instructional coaching. In the absence of pedagogical systems, they relied on prior K–12 experience or informal norms. The irony was that lack of oversight sometimes allowed greater freedom. Carl, for instance, restructured assignments and readings to align with resistance-focused teaching. This flexibility meant that coherence between DSTEs’ conceptions of social justice and teaching practices came at the expense of DSTEs’ professional growth.

Commitment vs. Care: The teacher education program voiced strong commitments to social justice in teacher preparation, yet DSTEs described inadequate care to sustain this work. Sara recalled mid-semester burnout, admitting, “I wanted to give my students more, but I had nothing left in the tank” (Interview 3, 10.30.24). Molly described the strain of constantly weighing accountability against compassion, asking how many extensions were too many: “I didn’t want to let them off the hook, I didn’t want to do them a disservice” (Interview 2, 10.25.24). Carl’s description of skipping meals underscored how financial strain added to this burden: “There were days where I had to ask myself, ‘Can I afford to eat lunch today?’” (Interview 2, 10.23.24).

In the end, rhetorical commitments to social justice contrasted sharply with the absence of institutional care, leaving DSTEes to provide care for students without receiving care themselves. *Theory vs. Practice:* DSTEes expressed frustration with the limited opportunities for students to apply justice frameworks in practice. While courses featured theories such as critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), authentic application was rare. Without fieldwork, DSTEes relied on approximations of practice, such as case studies, videos, and discussions. While these approximations had critical social justice goals, they could not replicate the transformative impact of real-world enactment. This tension between theory and practice reflects broader critiques of teacher education programs (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009).

Summary

DSTEes made intentional efforts to enact their conceptions of social justice in teaching through practices such as fostering critical reflection, integrating critical theories, situating learning within broader systems of oppression, and encouraging resistance and advocacy. While these practices demonstrated alignment between conceptions and practices, their enactment was uneven and shaped by institutional tensions. The teacher education program provided structure, and stability through syllabi, course frameworks, and cultural routines, but these same features restricted critical innovation and offered little financial, emotional, or pedagogical support.

DSTEes thus navigated tensions between institutional culture and critical pedagogy, structural coherence vs. pedagogical support, commitment vs. care, and theory and practice. Navigating these tensions simultaneously scaffolded DSTEes entry into teaching and constrained the possibilities for fully realizing their conceptions of social justice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I restate my purpose of research, I then discuss each of my research questions in turn. For each research question, I provide a summary of my findings, a theoretical interpretation of the findings, and programmatic implications. While these findings are not generalizable to all DSTE's, they add to our understandings of DSTE's' development and social justice teacher education.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how DSTE's conceptualize and apply social justice teacher education (SJTE) in their teaching. I used a qualitative within case and cross-case study approach to examine four DSTE's' conceptions of social justice, how they developed those conceptions, and how those conceptions enacted in their teaching. My exploration was driven my curiosity around how teacher educators learn what it means to "teach social justice" and the scarcity of literature on how teacher educators learn to teach for social justice (Goodwin & Darity, 2019; Goodwin & Chen 2016; Kavanagh, 2017; McDonald, 2007). My aim was to outline four DSTE's' conceptions of social justice, the experiences that led them to those conceptions, and how those conceptions enacted in their teaching practices. The findings from this study have practical implications for doctoral programs and research implications for the development of teacher educators [discussed in the conclusion]. I used Gorski's (2009) framework and Wenger's (1998) theory of social learning to help to analyze and discuss the findings.

It is essential for teacher education programs to prepare teacher educators who are both willing and equipped to teach for social justice. This development begins during their formative experiences as DSTE's. The pursuit of social justice is not a peripheral concern but central to the

well-being of those historically marginalized and oppressed. In the current U.S. political climate - marked by efforts from leaders such as Donald Trump and his allies to silence, exclude, and persecute marginalized communities - the responsibility of teacher education to cultivate justice-oriented educators is more urgent than ever. Sara summarized this effort in her survey response on the goal of social justice:

it's about fighting to transform our unjust world towards justice, [for] folks who are socially marginalized because of all the deep and systemic social forces that mediate who gets to have power and who gets to experience oppression in our society (racism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia) (Sara, Survey, 10.1.24)

Preparing teachers who are ready to see and address oppression involves teacher educators who see and address this oppression. The development of DSTE's is an important starting point.

RQ1: How do four DSTE's describe their conceptions of social justice within the context of teacher education?

Summary of Findings

In summary, all four DSTE's aligned with Gorski's (2009) teaching in sociopolitical context framework by emphasizing structural inequities, critical theory, and institutional critique. However, a point of divergence emerged around the role of resistance in social justice. While Carl and Sara framed resistance, activism, and the preparation of teachers as change agents as central to social justice, Molly and Maria took a more relational and reflective approach. They focused on creating inclusive, affirming spaces, and supporting individual identity development, but were less explicit about confronting systems through activism or encouraging direct resistance.

Table 27. Summary of DSTE's Conceptions of Social Justice

	DSTE's			
	Carl	Molly	Sara	Maria
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context				
Critical Analysis at Systemic Level	X	X	X	X

Consideration of Larger Sociopolitical Context	X		X	
Engagement of Critical Theories	X	X	X	X
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice				
Commitment to resistance and counter-hegemony	X		X	X
Application of critical consciousness	X		X	
Social Reconstruction as an explicit goal	X		X	

Theoretical Insights

All four doctoral student teacher educators (DSTEs) held conceptions of social justice aligned with the critical end of Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural and social justice teacher education. None reflected the conservative or liberal approaches, such as teaching "about the Other" or celebrating diversity without critique, which remain common in teacher education (Juárez et al., 2008; McDonald, 2007). Instead, each emphasized the structural nature of social justice, insisting that social justice teaching requires analysis of systemic forces and not simply surface-level recognition of difference. This collective orientation towards critical social justice is a positive development. The fact that each DSTE had lived experiences of marginalization and entered teaching from explicitly critical stances suggests that newer cohorts of teacher educators may be positioned to advance transformative commitments in the field.

Humanizing Pedagogy: All four DSTEs showed a commitment to humanizing pedagogy. Echoing Freire's (1970) vision of education as a practice of rehumanization, each DSTE emphasized student dignity, relationality, and the affirmation of full humanity as central to social justice teaching. Humanization was not peripheral but foundational and it was the ethical ground on which their critiques of oppression rested. Across DSTEs, criticality and humanization were not in tension but mutually reinforcing pillars of social justice teaching. This convergence resonates with Freire's (1998) call for teachers to pair critique of dehumanizing structures with pedagogy grounded in care, dignity, and authentic relationship.

Variations in Emphasis: Despite this shared critical foundation, the DSTEs varied meaningfully in how they enacted social justice, particularly regarding resistance and activism. These variations map onto Gorski's (2009) distinction between Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice and Teaching in Sociopolitical Context.

Resistance and Counter-Hegemony: Carl and Sara explicitly framed teaching as political work and aligned with Gorski's (2009) most transformative conception, Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice. Carl emphasized collective action and systemic critique, structuring his course to help students interrogate inequitable policies. Sara centered resistance to linguistic and cultural marginalization, using experiential activities (e.g., writing in a second language) to move students from awareness to action. For both, social justice was inseparable from activism: teaching was simultaneously a site of critique and a call to act. Their orientations resonate with Cochran-Smith's (2009) framing of teacher educators as "transformative intellectuals" whose responsibility extends beyond the classroom.

Critical Awareness and Relational Focus: Molly and Maria, while equally critical in diagnosing systemic inequities, emphasized relational, reflective, and advocacy-oriented approaches without consistently framing teachers as activists. Molly foregrounded student-centered pedagogy but stopped short of positioning teachers as disruptors of systemic structures. Maria drew from her own experiences under English-only policies to center linguistic justice, urging advocacy for multilingual students. Their orientations fit within Gorski's *Teaching in Sociopolitical Context*—foregrounding systemic awareness and criticality, but with less overtly activist praxis. This emphasis reflects Wenger's (1998) notion of negotiation within a community of practice: while Molly and Maria did not reject activist framings, they reinterpreted justice through the lens of relationships, care, and linguistic affirmation.

Together, these variations illustrate that even within a cohort aligned with critical conceptions, social justice teacher education is not monolithic. The split between activist resistance (Carl and Sara) and relational critique (Molly and Maria) demonstrates that participation in communities of practice can yield divergent enactments of justice, shaped by biography, positionality, and institutional context. This finding reinforces McDonald and Zeichner's (2009) warning that without shared frameworks, programs risk fragmentation in how justice is defined and taught, yet it also affirms the value of pluralism within a critical orientation.

Programmatic Implications

The findings from this study highlight both areas of coherence and divergence in how DSTEs conceptualized social justice. All four DSTEs grounded their conceptions of social justice in humanization and resisted surface-level liberal approaches. The differences between activist resistance (Carl and Sara) and relational critique (Molly and Maria) underscore that SJTE is not monolithic. These variations raise important programmatic and institutional questions about how teacher education programs define, support, and sustain commitments to social justice.

Positioning Teacher Educators as Activist: Should teacher education programs explicitly position teacher educators as activists? Programs must decide how broadly or narrowly they define the role of the teacher educator. If programs position activism as an essential dimension, then they must provide explicit preparation and protection for those engaging in resistance-focused pedagogy. If, instead, programs leave space for a wider range of enactments, they risk coherence challenges but may invite a more diverse set of teacher educators to sustain justice commitments over time (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Cultivating Coherence without Silencing Diversity: How do programs cultivate coherence in their vision for social justice? As McDonald and Zeichner (2009) cautioned, programs risk fragmentation and contradiction when social justice is left to individual interpretation. This was evident in the DSTEs' divergent conceptions of social justice. All DSTEs' conceptions were critical, but they were not all aligned in their emphasis on resistance. At the same time, an overly prescriptive or narrow definition of justice risks silencing teacher educators whose commitments emerge from different critical traditions. Programs must therefore strike a balance: articulating a shared conception of social justice that is distinct from liberal social justice and multiculturalism (Gorski, 2009) while honoring the diverse ways critical social justice can be enacted by teacher educators in classrooms. Such coherence should function as a guiding framework, not a limiting and restrictive model.

Shaping Future Cohorts: How programs answer these questions will shape the development of future cohorts of teacher educators. Programs that neglect to clarify the role of activism, fail to provide institutional support, or leave social justice to individual interpretation risk undermining the transformative potential of SJTE. Conversely, programs that intentionally foster supportive conditions and articulate a critical, yet flexible vision create the possibility for coherence across diverse enactments.

The challenge and opportunity for programs is to design structures that allow DSTEs to sustain commitments to justice in both theory and practice, while also preparing them to navigate the institutional tensions that inevitably arise. In doing so, programs can move closer to what Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) describe as "social justice teacher education for sustainability," creating durable commitments that endure across contexts and generations of educators.

RQ2: What experiences contribute to the development of the four DSTEs' conceptions of social justice?**Summary of Findings**

Each phase of the DSTEs' journeys extended, redirected, dismissed, reinterpreted, modified, or confirmed their understandings of social justice (Wenger, 1998). Their conceptions did not emerge in isolation but developed through a set of overlapping experiences that pressed them to confront injustice, seek language to name it, and reframe their own roles as educators.

Childhood experiences with injustice: These early moments of personally encountering or witnessing the oppression of others provided the first awareness of institutional and systemic inequities.

Exposure to critical theories: most often during their doctoral programs, though for Sara this came earlier through her parents' influence. Critical frameworks gave DSTEs the language and conceptual tools to articulate experiences of oppression and analyze them in systemic terms.

Social participation in communities of practice: Engaging with peers, mentors, students, and activist communities allowed DSTEs to test, extend, and reinterpret their perspectives. These social contexts functioned as communities of practice, where shared dialogue and collective problem-solving made conceptions of social justice more robust and more connected to real-world teaching.

Institutional tensions: played a significant role. DSTEs repeatedly encountered contradictions between institutions' rhetorical commitments to justice and their actual practices. For example, witnessing superficial or unsupported "equity initiatives" led DSTEs to question not only how social justice was framed by teacher education programs, but also how institutions themselves perpetuated inequity. These moments of contradiction became sites of reflection that

pushed DSTEs to sharpen their critical consciousness and redirect their justice efforts toward more action-oriented commitments.

In sum, DSTEs' conceptions of social justice were not fixed. They shifted over time through moments of conflict, agreement, and reflection. Personal background, exposure to theory, social participation in communities of practice, and institutional tensions all worked together to shape their conceptions of social justice.

Theoretical Insights

Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework help explain why DSTEs' development of conceptions of social justice rarely followed a clear linear path. In theory, doctoral programs should function as communities where "old-timers" scaffold newcomers' learning through guided participation, gradually moving them toward fuller participation. Yet in this study, faculty influence was fragmented and inconsistent. DSTEs did not experience faculty as consistent co-constructors of social justice conceptions. Instead, their understandings were extended, reinterpreted, or sometimes confirmed through partial encounters with teacher educators (faculty) that intersected with their prior experiences, positionalities, peer learning, and institutional tensions.

Teacher educators (faculty) were not irrelevant. Carl credited coursework that introduced critical race theory and teacher education scholarship with sharpening his systemic critique. Sara described a pivotal moment when faculty framed translanguaging as a resource for equity, which transformed her approach to linguistic justice. These encounters were episodic and unevenly distributed. Without systematic scaffolding, DSTEs wove teacher educator contributions into broader webs of experience, rather than seeing them as to their conceptions of social justice. Other experiences proved to be more formative for DSTEs' conceptions of social justice.

Childhood experiences provided interpretive frames when program structures fell short. Carl viewed his financial insecurity during the doctorate through the lens of his upbringing in economic insecurity, which deepened his understanding of structural inequity. Sara's bilingual upbringing, shaped by her parents' critical orientation, allowed her to interpret translanguaging not simply as an instructional strategy but as an enactment of linguistic justice. These prior experiences supplied the urgency and interpretive depth that programmatic inputs alone could not provide.

DSTEs also developed their conceptions through exposure to critical theories. Critical frameworks introduced in coursework gave DSTEs the conceptual tools to analyze inequities systemically. Carl drew on critical race theory to refine his systemic critique, while Molly gravitated toward humanizing pedagogies to affirm students' dignity. Importantly, theory was rarely sustained by faculty mentorship. Instead, DSTEs made theory meaningful by actively connecting it to their biographies and teaching contexts. As Wenger (1998) suggests, learning is not only about knowledge acquisition but about becoming a certain kind of person in practice. For DSTEs, theory mattered most when it resonated with lived experiences and was reinforced through social participation.

Peer learning and activist participation often served as communities of practice. Rather than faculty, it was peers, students, and activist spaces that consistently extended and reinterpreted conceptions of justice. Sara and Maria reported that dialogue with classmates allowed them to test ideas and receive feedback in ways faculty rarely facilitated. Molly pointed to her students' resistance as a catalyst for refining her pedagogy. These relational encounters provided sustained engagement where DSTEs could grapple with tensions, refine strategies, and

co-construct meaning together. In practice, peers, not faculty, functioned as the central force in DSTEs' conceptions of social justice development.

Finally, institutional tensions shaped DSTEs' orientations in paradoxical ways. Carl saw his financial precarity as evidence of broader structural inequities, while Sara interpreted the program's neglect as mirroring wider patterns of marginalization. Similarly, Molly and Maria highlighted the contradiction between the program's equity discourse and its lack of meaningful pedagogical support. DSTEs repeatedly encountered contradictions between the program's rhetorical commitments to justice and its actual practices. This reflects what Wenger (1998) describes as misalignment between institutional structures and DSTEs' values, where stated commitments fail to translate into practice.

Rather than derailing their development, these contradictions became part of what Zeichner (2005) calls the "hidden curriculum" of doctoral preparation. DSTEs did not passively endure these conditions but analyzed them through the interpretive resources they had developed from childhood, theory, and peer dialogue. In doing so, they extended, reinterpreted, or redirected their justice commitments toward more action-oriented stances.

In sum, DSTEs' development of social justice conceptions was shaped by both what programs failed to provide and what they intentionally offered. Their conceptions did not emerge in isolation or through linear faculty scaffolding. Instead, they unfolded through a complex interplay: fragmented faculty inputs, the grounding of personal histories, the analytic tools of critical theory, the dialogic space of peers and activist communities, and the reflective force of institutional tensions. This uneven constellation highlights the paradox at the heart of doctoral preparation: DSTEs learned about social justice not through systematic program design, but

through the necessity of navigating gaps, tensions, and contradictions that pressed them to extend, reinterpret, or confirm their orientations over time.

Programmatic Implications

The paradox that emerged from these findings carries direct programmatic implications. On the one hand, DSTEs learned from faculty in uneven but meaningful ways through theoretical exposure, pedagogical modeling, and selective curricular framings. On the other hand, the absence of sustained structures meant that their most powerful lessons came from seeing institutional contradictions as enactments of injustice. This dual reality suggests that doctoral programs cannot assume SJTE will occur organically. Without intentional supports, students will continue to develop their conceptions of social justice in fragmented ways, often shaped more by institutional neglect than by deliberate design. The challenge for programs, then, is how to move from a hidden curriculum of contradictions toward an intentional curriculum that systematically nurtures social justice teacher educators.

The limited and uneven role of faculty mentors underscores the need for doctoral programs to move beyond the assumption that critical perspectives will naturally emerge through exposure to readings or occasional teaching opportunities. Wenger's (1998) framework suggests that newcomers learn through guided participation with more experienced members of a community of practice, yet in this case DSTEs did not consistently co-construct their understandings alongside more experienced teacher educators (faculty). This absence highlights the need for intentional mentorship structures: co-teaching arrangements, collaborative curriculum design, and reflective advising. These structures would create ongoing opportunities for DSTEs to develop their social justice practices in dialogue with faculty rather than in isolation.

Equally important, the findings reveal that formal structures for sustained engagement with social justice were missing. Coursework occasionally introduced critical frameworks. Carl, for example, credited his engagement with critical race theory in doctoral classes, yet these moments were episodic rather than embedded across the program. As Conklin (2021) and Dinkelman et al. (2012) argue, too often doctoral education neglects teacher education pedagogy as a scholarly subject. Establishing ongoing seminars, inquiry groups, or communities of practice dedicated to social justice in teacher education would provide doctoral students with the space to test ideas, reflect, and receive feedback in supportive and critical ways.

Most troubling, DSTE's often interpreted institutional tensions (financial insecurity, lack of support, and programmatic neglect) as lessons in (in)justice. While these experiences did foster critical reflection, relying on injustice as an implicit curriculum risks normalizing harm as a pedagogical tool. Addressing these conditions must therefore be seen not only as an ethical obligation but as a programmatic responsibility. The institutional environments in which doctoral students develop shape the educators they will become. Therefore, teacher education programs should attend to these failures in equity, financial security, and pedagogical support to prepare social justice teacher educators.

Finally, the uneven role of faculty across the program points to the need for greater coherence around social justice commitments. As McDonald and Zeichner (2009) cautioned, when social justice is left to individual interpretation, a program risks diluting the term into contradictory meanings. The task, therefore, is to establish a clear critical orientation that emphasizes structural critique, humanization, and systemic awareness. Teacher education programs must develop their clear critical orientation without collapsing into rigid homogeneity.

Coherence should not be about sameness but about cultivating a common commitment that holds steady and embraces difference.

RQ3: How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEes enacted in their teaching?

Summary of Findings

DSTEes appear to have made intentional efforts to enact their conceptions of social justice in teaching through practices such as fostering critical reflection, integrating critical theories, situating learning within broader systems of oppression, and encouraging resistance and advocacy. While these practices demonstrated alignment between conceptions and practices, their enactment was uneven and shaped by institutional tensions. The teacher education program provided structure, and stability through syllabi, course frameworks, and cultural routines, but these same features restricted critical innovation and offered little financial, emotional, or pedagogical support.

DSTEes thus navigated tensions between institutional culture and critical pedagogy, structural coherence vs. pedagogical support, commitment vs. care, and theory and practice. Navigating these tensions simultaneously scaffolded DSTEes entry into teaching and constrained the possibilities for fully realizing their conceptions of social justice.

Theoretical Insights

This section addresses the third research question by analyzing how DSTEes' conceptions of social justice were enacted in their teaching, and the institutional conditions that shaped or constrained those enactments. Across cases, two core themes emerged: (1) DSTEes did attempt to put their critical conceptions into practice, and (2) those practices were constrained by institutional tensions. These findings offer new insights into the relationship between social

justice commitments and pedagogical enactment, particularly for novice educators working within underdeveloped communities of practice.

Weak Communities of Practice: Wenger's (1998) theory of social learning emphasized that practices emerge within communities of practice, shaped by the interactions and priorities of their members. A significant challenge for DSTEs was the weakness of their professional communities within the teacher education program. Wenger (1998) argued that communities of practice should facilitate mutual engagement, shared repertoires, and knowledge exchange, yet DSTEs experienced an absence of sustained mentorship from teacher educators and collegial support from the teacher education program.

The concern with the weak communities of practice is that they can hinder the transfer of pedagogical knowledge, forcing DSTEs to develop their approaches to teaching in isolation. DSTEs relying on K-12 practices meant that it was challenging for them to teach in a way that enacted their conceptions of social justice.

Institutional Constraints and Content Overload: The amount of content that DSTEs had to address in their courses was a tension that constrained the inclusion of social justice. Maria and Sara had to engage with literacy methods, multilingual education, and social justice simultaneously. Furthermore, DSTEs had limited time to tailor course materials. Given their late access to syllabi and institutional constraints on curriculum modifications, their ability to integrate social justice was limited.

As a result of these constraints DSTEs reported feeling forced to "squeeze in" critical content or sacrifice depth for breadth. This reflects a form of what Wenger (1998) refers to as "misalignment" within a community of practice: the gap between what DSTEs value and what is supported or enabled by institutional reification (e.g., course syllabi, program expectations).

Although these syllabi might be intended to scaffold course design, they often restricted DSTEs from adapting materials to reflect their own commitments. Thus, even when social justice participation was desired, the artifacts available for reification were misaligned with that vision. *Student Pushback and Resistance:* Resistance from students, particularly White students, posed another challenge. Maria and Sara noted that students from dominant social groups often struggled to grasp the lived realities of marginalized communities. The resistance took various forms, from disengagement to direct pushback when DSTEs challenged students' assumptions. This emotional labor was an additional burden on DSTEs, who often felt responsible for navigating students' resistance while also fostering critical consciousness.

This finding aligns with broader research that identifies White student resistance as a recurring obstacle in social justice teacher education (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; Picower, 2009). DSTEs experienced this resistance as both pedagogical and emotional labor. Rather than being buffered by a community of practice, they navigated these tensions alone, often without guidance or emotional support. This isolated DSTEs from the dialogical process that is essential to critical pedagogy; instead of engaging in collective reflection and transformation, they were left to bear the burden of problem solving themselves.

Theory-Practice Divide: A longstanding challenge in teacher education is the disconnect between theory and practice (Sleeter, 2017). Maria and Sara attempted to address this by modeling social justice-based pedagogies and encouraging students to integrate critical perspectives into lesson planning. However, the lack of field-based teaching experiences limited students' ability to apply these concepts in real classrooms. Without structured opportunities for applying social justice theories in real teaching contexts, DSTEs struggled to move beyond conceptual discussions toward meaningful action.

Programmatic Implications

The variation in DSTE's' conceptions of social justice has important implications for program coherence and the professional development of teacher educators. When social justice is left to individual interpretation, as was largely the case in this doctoral program, a teacher education program can struggle to present a clear, consistent vision to its teachers. As McDonald and Zeichner (2009) warned, without a shared understanding, vastly different (even contradictory) approaches can all be labeled "social justice" within the same program. This study provides confirmation of this risk. Within a small group of DSTE's, there was a difference in their conceptions of social justice. Carl and Sara emphasized more resistance and transformatory conceptions while Molly and Maria emphasized awareness of oppression and the adoption of humanizing practices. Furthermore, DSTE's focus on injustice varied: Carl focused on injustices related more broadly (race, poverty, and sexual orientation) whereas Sara, Molly, and Maria focused on linguistic injustices. These differences in social justice conceptions likely translated into differences in practice (what and how each DSTE prioritizes social justice in their courses). A preservice teacher moving through the program could therefore experience social justice education as a moving target with different messages on what matters in SJTE. Without guidance, the candidates themselves might not know how to synthesize these messages, potentially leading to confusion or a shallow take-away that social justice is "everything and nothing." Program coherence suffers when faculty each pull in slightly different directions under the same banner.

That said, the variation is not inherently negative if handled properly. There is a richness in having multiple perspectives as social justice is multi-faceted, and teacher candidates can benefit from seeing it modeled in different ways (critical analysis, humanizing relationships,

community activism, etc.). The key is that these differences must be made explicit and discussed, rather than left implicit. This is where teacher educator development and collaboration become crucial. Teacher education programs committed to social justice need to invest in continuous professional learning for their instructors (including DSTEs and adjuncts, not just full professors) to articulate and align their conceptions and practices. My findings suggest several focal points for such development. First, using a framework like Gorski's typology (2009) could help faculty locate themselves on an ideological continuum and recognize the approaches of their colleagues. For instance, a faculty workshop could have DSTEs reflect: Do I mainly teach *about* structural inequities (sociopolitical context) or do I also teach my candidates to *challenge* those inequities (resistance practice)? Having Carl, Sara, Molly, and Maria map their conceptions in this way could have spurred a dialogue on where the program wants to be on that spectrum. The goal would be not to erase individual differences, but to prevent unexamined divergence that undermines the common mission.

Second, my study highlights that DSTEs, as novices, might benefit from guided reflection and mentorship to integrate their personal commitments with effective pedagogy. All four DSTEs were deeply passionate and had strong critical knowledge (e.g., they could cite Freire, CRT, etc., and had personal convictions) but translating that into teaching practice is another leap. They would benefit from faculty mentors who explicitly discuss *how* to bring activism into the classroom (or, conversely, how to ensure critical reflection translates to action), so that those like Molly and Maria who lean toward the awareness end might learn strategies to incorporate resistance pedagogies and transformative pedagogies, and those like Carl and Sara might refine how they scaffold activism for teachers. In the absence of formal mentorship, DSTEs rely on trial and error or peer support, which can reinforce the status quo or cause anxiety

about deviating from norms. Teacher educator development should also tackle the very institutional tensions the DSTE's identified. For example, helping new instructors navigate resistance from students or lack of time for social justice topics. The more DSTE's feel supported in enacting their ideals (through co-planning time, shared resources, and moral support from leadership), the more confidently they can maintain ambitious conceptions in practice. Without such support, even a critical conception might lose its power in practice, especially if the institution sends mixed signals.

Another implication is the need for programmatic alignment: admissions, curriculum design, and supervision all should reflect a consistent social justice orientation. If a program admits DSTE's and faculty who espouse critical ideologies (as seems to be the case here, given all four were critical), it then owes them a program structure that leverages that strength rather than diluting it. For example, if the program's official curriculum sidelines social justice content until late (as Molly noted), this is a structural incoherence that needs to be fixed for the sake of both faculty and students. Program leaders might take the initiative to formally define social justice education in their context through a set of core principles that every course is expected to address. Having such a guiding document could reduce ambiguity and help all teacher educators to pull in the same direction, while still allowing personal styles. It also provides a touchstone for evaluating and developing new teacher educators (including DSTE's): instead of each DSTE's reinventing the wheel during their apprenticeship, they can be introduced to the program's shared philosophy and see concrete examples of what it looks like in teaching practice.

Finally, the variation in conceptions spotlights an opportunity for peer learning and faculty dialogue. Rather than view differences as a problem to eliminate, programs can create safe spaces for teacher educators to share their understanding and even debate the tough

questions (e.g., *Is it appropriate to ask preservice teachers to engage in activism?*). Such discussions, if facilitated in a spirit of mutual learning, could deepen everyone's conceptions. Bringing these conversations to the surface is a key step in teacher educator development for SJTE. It helps surface any contradictions, allowing the program to address them collectively. The solution to disparate conceptions is *not* enforcing uniformity but fostering communities of practice among faculty where social justice is a continual shared inquiry, rather than a buzzword each person interprets alone. My findings underscore that DSTE's are eager and able to engage in such inquiry as they are already reflecting deeply on social justice, and with structured support, they could become a driving force for greater coherence and innovation in their programs.

Broader Patterns in Teacher Education

The patterns observed in this case study of four DSTE's reflect broader systemic issues in teacher education, revealing both challenges and hopeful signs for the field. In the United States, teacher education programs have adopted the rhetoric of social justice (Zeichner, 2009), yet the implementation of these ideals remains uneven and tension. Programs frequently lack clarity on what "social justice" means in concrete terms, leading to a patchwork of faculty practices and philosophies (as the DSTE's' experiences mirror). Thomas et al. (2019) noted that without clear definitions or pedagogical guidance, faculty construct their own widely varying understandings, resulting in uneven and fragmented instruction. The four DSTE's encountered this fragmentation in their institutional experiences. This fragmentation is not unique to their program; it is symptomatic of a larger trend in which social justice is embraced in principle but not systematically integrated in practice (Wronowski et al., 2022). The significance of my findings is that they provide an inside look at how such fragmentation plays out through the varied conceptions of DSTE's trying to make sense of social justice.

This study also highlights a potential shift in the criticality of teacher educators. All four DSTEs in this study embraced a critical perspective (with none falling into deficit views or the trivializing “celebrate diversity” mode) is noteworthy. This finding contrasts with earlier studies that found many educators held uncritical or even deficit-oriented conceptions (Gorski, 2009). This finding could suggest a generational shift or the positive impact of doctoral training focused on social justice. This potential shift in DSTEs’ criticality is positive as they will enter their future roles as teacher educators with critical dispositions already in place. The four DSTEs’ variation is based on the level of activism, which is an easier challenge to overcome than variation of social justice conceptions from conservative to liberal or liberal to critical. Encouraging DSTEs to make those changes in their conceptions of social justice is a more challenging task.

The criticality of the four DSTEs could indicate that the pipeline of teacher educators might be moving in a more critical direction, drawing in people from diverse backgrounds with strong social justice commitments (the DSTEs include individuals from LGBTQ, multiracial, immigrant, and bilingual communities). Their presence and stance challenge the homogeneity and passivity that have historically characterized teacher education. If supported, they could collectively push the field toward more courageous practices. However, if the systemic patterns of ambiguity and institutional resistance persist, there is a risk that these promising DSTEs could be co-opted or discouraged, diluting the impact they might have. Thus, this study underscores a critical juncture: the field must intentionally harness the potential of new social justice DSTEs by addressing the very systemic issues I have discussed: clarifying definitions, aligning program practices with social justice commitments, and shielding and encouraging educators who take risks to teach for justice.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study confirms that DSTE's have a variety of critical conceptions of social justice. These conceptions of social justice were developed early encounters with injustice, exposure to critical theories, participation in communities of practice, and engagement with institutional tensions. DSTE's enacted their conceptions of social justice in practice, but the depth and sustainability of that enactment was constrained by institutional tensions. The DSTE's' experiences make visible the paradox of doctoral preparation: while programs cultivate critical commitments in uneven but meaningful ways, the absence of intentional supports leaves those commitments vulnerable to fragmentation and constraint. The challenge for the field is to move from a hidden curriculum of contradictions toward intentional, collective structures that prepare social justice teacher educators not only to imagine a more just future but to enact it in practice. In the following sections, I provide suggestions for how teacher education programs, teacher educators, and scholars might begin to address this challenge through practice and research.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study highlight both the possibilities and constraints that DSTE's face as they work to conceptualize and enact social justice in teacher preparation. While each DSTE demonstrated commitments to critical social justice, their efforts were often shaped, and sometimes constrained, by institutional structures, limited mentorship, and personal challenges. These factors suggest that advancing SJTE cannot be left to the resilience of individual doctoral students. Instead, programs, faculty, and institutions must intentionally create conditions that support the development of conceptions of social justice and related teaching practices. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) framework of communities of practice, the implications outlined below emphasize the need for structural alignment, robust mentorship, and programmatic coherence so

that justice is not treated by teacher educators as optional or peripheral, but as a central and sustainable practice within teacher education.

Structured Development of Conceptions

This study shows that DSTEs' conceptions of social justice developed through lived experiences, coursework, and reflective practice, yet programs rarely provided structured opportunities to articulate and refine those conceptions. To address this gap, doctoral programs should:

- 1) Integrate structured reflection into coursework
 - a) Faculty can design assignments such as positionality maps or autoethnographic writing projects.
 - b) These activities should be iterative, occurring across multiple courses, so that DSTEs revisit and refine their conceptions over time rather than completing a one-off reflection.

By embedding structured, iterative reflection into coursework, programs can ensure DSTEs move beyond fragmented experiences toward coherent conceptions of social justice. Doing so positions doctoral preparation as a site where conceptions of social justice are not left to chance but are deliberately cultivated and sustained.

Aligning Rhetoric with Practice

A recurring finding in this study was programmatic misalignment: institutions promoted “diversity” or “social justice” rhetorically but failed to create conditions that allowed DSTEs to enact justice in meaningful ways. This gap created frustration, burnout, and a sense of individual failure when DSTEs could not live up to ideals that were unsupported structurally. To move beyond rhetoric, institutions should:

1. Embed social justice learning objectives into program design

- Ensure every required course has clearly stated social justice learning outcomes. For example, methods courses might require students to design lesson plans that explicitly address inequities or integrate culturally sustaining pedagogy.
 - Revise assessment practices so they measure not only technical competence but also the ability to apply critical frameworks.
2. Provide flexibility in course design
- Allow DSTE's to experiment with pedagogies that move beyond lecture and standardized grading. This could include project-based learning, restorative assessment approaches, or community-engaged assignments.
 - Adjust time structures (e.g., block scheduling, hybrid formats) to give DSTE's space to try innovative practices without being bound by rigid templates.
3. Center doctoral student well-being
- Collect data on attrition, burnout, and financial precarity to identify structural risk factors.
 - Develop concrete retention supports, such as increasing stipends to a living wage, offering health and counseling resources, and creating policies that recognize caregiving responsibilities.
 - Normalize discussions of emotional labor in teaching, so well-being is seen as part of professional preparation rather than a personal burden.
4. Ensure coherence across coursework and fieldwork
- Develop shared rubrics and reflection protocols across university and field sites to prevent contradictory messages about what “counts” as good teaching.

- Create cross-role professional learning communities that include faculty, DSTEs, and mentor teachers to align program vision with practice.

When social justice is treated as optional or left to the discretion of individual teacher educators, DSTEs likely internalize failure when they cannot fully enact their commitments. To support DSTEs, teacher education programs must take a more dedicated approach to SJTE.

Communities of Practice and Mentorship

DSTEs frequently shouldered the emotional labor of teaching social justice without support. Without intentional supports, social justice teaching often became an isolating and unsustainable endeavor. To counter this, programs should build sustainable communities of practice (CoPs) and embed robust mentorship structures that affirm DSTEs' identities while offering practical support.

1. Establish structured, recurring peer CoPs
 - Create scheduled forums (e.g., monthly or bi-weekly gatherings) where DSTEs collaboratively debrief classroom resistance, share teaching materials, and co-construct strategies for navigating institutional tensions.
 - Position these CoPs as formal program components rather than optional add-ons, ensuring protected time within teaching and coursework schedules.
2. Institutionalize CoPs beyond individual cohorts
 - Develop mechanisms to preserve collective knowledge across years (sustainable aspect), for example, shared digital repositories of teaching resources, annotated syllabi, or recorded workshops.
 - Support continuity by having faculty advisors oversee CoPs, providing stability when student cohorts turn over.

3. Encourage intergenerational and cross-role CoPs

- Pair novice DSTEs with advanced peers, alumni, and faculty who model justice praxis in teaching.
- Facilitate joint learning groups that include preservice teachers, DSTEs, and faculty, strengthening alignment across program levels.
- Use these intergenerational spaces to normalize the tensions of justice teaching and to model strategies for long-term sustainability.

CoPs and mentorship offer DSTEs both teaching approaches and emotional affirmation, reinforcing that their justice commitments are valid and sustainable. Gorski (2019) underscores that social justice educators often operate under “threats to their well-being.” Embedding CoPs and mentorship into doctoral preparation is therefore not just pedagogical, it is an ethical obligation to create the conditions in which DSTEs can endure, flourish, and lead social justice-oriented change.

Embedding Justice in Clinical Practice

DSTEs expressed deep frustration that preservice teachers rarely had authentic opportunities to enact justice in field contexts, which left critical frameworks abstract and disconnected from practice. Although coursework often introduced justice and equity theories, these concepts were difficult for preservice teachers to apply when clinical settings reinforced traditional hierarchies and standardized teaching norms. To bridge this gap, programs should:

1. Redesign field placements to prioritize equity and justice focused contexts:
 - Develop partnerships with community-based organizations, afterschool programs, or dual-language settings where social justice frameworks are actively taught.

- Ensure these placements are not framed as “alternative” or marginal, but as central to teacher preparation.
2. Integrate justice praxis into clinical expectations:
- Revise practicum evaluation rubrics to include specific indicators of social justice teaching (e.g., use of inclusive curriculum, critical questioning of texts, family/community engagement).
 - Require preservice teachers to design and implement lessons that apply critical frameworks, followed by structured debriefs with DSTEs and mentor teachers.
 - Provide support for navigating pushback and helping preservice teachers learn how to balance institutional expectations with equity commitments.
3. Build university–school partnerships that center social justice:
- Move beyond transactional placement agreements toward partnerships where community voices shape program goals and expectations.
 - Invite families, community leaders, and social justice educators into program advisory boards, co-designing fieldwork that reflects local justice priorities.

Embedding justice directly into fieldwork ensures that preservice teachers move beyond the theory of social justice and practice social justice teaching. It also removed the obligation of DSTEs having to try and translate critical frameworks in classrooms that are structurally misaligned.

Implications for Research

This study provides insight into how a small group of self-identified social justice DSTEs developed and enacted their conceptions of social justice. However, the findings also reveal key gaps that future research must address to strengthen the field of SJTE. These implications call for

expanded sampling, longitudinal inquiry, and greater attention to transitions, mentorship, and impact on preservice teachers. These directions are grounded in the study's findings, Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning, and Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural education.

Expand Research Beyond Self-Identified Social Justice DSTEs

All four DSTEs in this study identified as justice-oriented and held critical conceptions of social justice. Their development was influenced by prior teaching experience, exposure to critical theory, and resistance to institutional norms. However, this sample may reflect self-selection bias, raising important questions about DSTEs who do not explicitly identify with social justice frameworks.

As Gorski (2009) notes, many teacher educators adopt more liberal or conservative orientations that stop short of systemic critique or resistance. Studying non-self-identified DSTEs could illuminate how institutional cultures, coursework, and peer dynamics either foster or suppress critical perspectives.

Wenger's (1998) theory reminds us that participation in a community of practice (CoP) is not uniform; DSTEs with different identities or positions in the program may encounter different learning pathways and barriers. Future research should explore whether DSTEs outside self-identified justice communities develop conceptions of justice and, if so, through what mechanisms and with what limitations.

Conduct Longitudinal Studies of DSTEs' Engagement with Social Justice

Findings from this study suggest that DSTEs' conceptions of social justice are dynamic and develop over time through exposure to coursework, peer support, and reflective practice. For example, Carl's deepening understanding through critical race theory and spatial analysis

illustrates how theoretical engagement can expand conceptions, but this development was uneven, context-dependent, and ongoing.

Wenger (1998) emphasizes that identity formation and learning are temporal, shaped through evolving participation in CoPs. Longitudinal research is needed to capture how DSTEs' conceptions of social justice shift or stabilize over the course of their doctoral experience.

Gorski's framework can help assess whether DSTEs retain critical orientations or face institutional drift toward less transformative approaches. Such studies would also clarify the key touchpoints (e.g., critical coursework, fieldwork, resistance experiences) that most significantly shape development.

Examine the Transition from DSTE to Teacher Educator

DSTEs in this study experienced a lack of formal pedagogical preparation and mentorship, which complicated their ability to enact social justice pedagogy confidently and coherently. This gap raises concerns about how DSTEs navigate the transition from doctoral student to full-time faculty roles, especially within institutions that espouse social justice rhetorically but fail to support it structurally.

Wenger (1998) describes transitions within a CoP as requiring support, legitimacy, and opportunities for competence negotiation, which DSTEs in this study lacked. Future research should examine how institutional culture, promotion criteria, and peer expectations shape the long-term enactment of SJTE among former DSTEs.

Follow Preservice Teachers to Examine the Impact of DSTEs' Teaching

While DSTEs modeled social justice pedagogy, they noted limited opportunities for preservice teachers to apply these frameworks in field placements. As a result, DSTEs worried

that their students might struggle to implement social justice practices in real classrooms, especially when facing resistance or institutional constraints.

Wenger (1998) argued that full participation in a CoP involves practical engagement, not just discourse. Following preservice teachers into their classrooms as teachers would allow researchers to evaluate whether they are able to enact social justice teaching, resist inequitable policies, and sustain critical commitments.

Study the Role of Mentorship in Sustaining DSTEs

A key finding was the absence of formal pedagogical mentorship during DSTEs' doctoral training. Instead, DSTEs relied on informal support, self-guided learning, or trial-and-error approaches to develop their instructional practice. This lack of mentorship limited their ability to refine and sustain justice-oriented pedagogy.

Wenger (1998) highlights mentorship as a central process by which newcomers DSTEs become full members in a CoP. Structured, justice oriented mentorship could help DSTEs build coherence between their conceptions and practices, especially in the face of institutional resistance. Future research should examine how structured mentorship relationships influence the long-term professional identity, instructional choices, and critical commitments of DSTEs.

Together, these five research directions build on the findings of this study and deepen our understanding of how DSTEs develop, sustain, and enact social justice conceptions. Expanding the research base in these directions will support more effective preparation, support, and accountability structures for justice-oriented teacher educators.

Limitations

The dissertation is limited by the number of DSTEs studied. The small number of DSTEs (4) only represents a small percentage of the DSTEs within the study context. Furthermore, the

DSTEs all come from a single context and therefore are not representative of the learning experience of DSTEs as a whole. Future research could expand the number of DSTEs and compare one context with another. The timeframe of the study is narrow and therefore only captures a snapshot of DSTEs' conceptions of social justice at a point in time. The study is not longitudinal and does not shed light on possible changes in DSTEs' conceptions of social justice or their teaching practices over time. Future research could follow DSTEs into their first years as teacher educators after graduation to better understand how teacher educators develop conceptions of social justice and their teaching practices over time. The study only observes two lessons. This small number of observations limits how accurately I can answer research question 3 - How are the conceptions of social justice held by the four DSTEs enacted in their teaching? The examination of course artifacts should give some understanding of teaching practices, but there is the chance that DSTEs do not teach in a way that is representative of their "regular" teaching as they know I am coming to observe and the focus of my study. Future research could add additional observations of DSTEs as they teach to better understand what teaching practices they are using.

Final Thoughts

This study demonstrates that DSTEs carry critical conceptions of social justice that are deeply informed by personal experiences of injustice, critical theory, and peer participation. Yet these commitments were also shaped, and at times constrained, by institutional contradictions. Taken together, the findings underscore the paradox of doctoral preparation: while programs cultivate critical commitments in uneven but meaningful ways, the absence of intentional support often leaves those commitments vulnerable to dilution or burnout. This paradox becomes both a

site of learning for DSTE's, but also source of tension as they attempt to enact their social justice conceptions.

For teacher education programs, this study affirms the promise of a new generation of social justice teacher educators who enter the profession with critical frameworks already in place. However, this study also signals an urgent need for programmatic structures, mentorship, and institutional coherence that transform justice from an individual commitment into a collective, sustainable practice. Future research should follow DSTE's beyond their doctoral programs, tracing how their commitments evolve into faculty roles and how institutional contexts either sustain or erode justice-oriented trajectories.

Ultimately, preparing social justice educators requires more than rhetorical vision statements. It requires intentional communities of practice, systemic alignment, and a recognition that equity cannot be left to the resilience of individual DSTE's. Programs must choose to enter the tug of war and "pull" the rope on the side of justice. By doing so, teacher education can move from hidden contradictions to intentional design, ensuring that social justice is not just imagined, but lived in practice.

Appendix A

Gorski's Typology of Multicultural Teacher Education

Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural teacher education highlights five distinct approaches that teacher educators take to multicultural and social justice teacher education for preservice teachers: (1) Teaching the Other (2) Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity (3) Teaching with Multicultural Competence (4) Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (5) Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice. Below, aspects of each of the five approaches is described.

CONSERVATIVE

Teaching the Other

1. *using othering language*
 - a. "implicitly or explicitly defines a person or group as being outside the realm of normalcy."
 - b. groups of color and other disenfranchised peoples as "co-cultures" or "subgroups"—explicit othering language.
 - c. Assumption of White students – how do we prepare for diversity – we/them – us/they dichotomy.
2. *presenting nondominant groups as homogeneous*
 - a. homogenize identity groups. Several of the syllabi suggested homogeneity within non-dominant groups—but none did so within dominant groups.
 - b. "contributions" approach to multicultural education. These designs essentialized identity groups, referencing them primarily in terms of surface-level cultural traits and contributions. But of equal interest was the organization of the course, built upon an assumption of homogeneity within each of these groups. This sort of organization was another shared feature among these syllabi.
3. *defining multicultural education through a market-centric or capitalistic lens.*
 - a. including the notion that the purpose of education is to prepare students for the global marketplace. They focused largely on preparing teachers to manage diversity by gaining a simplified, surface-level understanding of the cultures of people from various identity groups. An analysis of these syllabi suggested little or no attention to power and privilege concerns, or even to a complex understanding of diversity.

LIBERAL

Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity

1. *a tendency to frame multicultural education as respecting and celebrating diversity*
 - a. identified the preparation of educators to respect, accept, or celebrate diversity as a central goal—if not the central course goal.

- b. References to respecting diversity often were couched in an assimilationist sort of pluralism, sometimes in ways that problematized diversity.
 - c. Other syllabi reflecting this approach referred to developing a “commitment to human diversity,” “respecting human diversity,” and “celebrating differences.”
2. *a focus on sensitivity and self-reflection*
- a. connected a commitment to respecting or valuing diversity with eliminating educational inequities.
 - b. Rather, the courses appeared designed to encourage sensitivity and self-reflection. For example, the ability to “tolerate” difference was an oft-cited competence to be addressed in these courses.,
 - c. centered self-reflection—particularly regarding one’s biases—in the MTE process. This course takes an in-depth critical reflection and discovery of self and of the ways in which personal values develop form the integration.
3. *a failure to connect either of these—respecting diversity or self-reflecting—to educational inequities.*
- a. lack of consideration of educational inequities. systemic inequities. None of them drew connections between respecting diversity or identifying one’s biases and larger contextual factors, such as race, gender, or class inequity. Instead, these syllabi suggested a very interpersonal focus to MTE—an approach less interested in systemic change than in human relations. Even when these syllabi named dimensions of identity around which educational inequities exist, they did so in the context of relationship building rather than inequities.

Teaching with Multicultural Competence

- 1) *the centering of multicultural competence*
- a. the primary goal of one course was to “provide potential educators...with entry level knowledge about becoming culturally responsive teachers in culturally diverse inclusive, and inner city, urban classrooms.”
 - b. Several included course objectives such as learning “culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies” or demonstrating “cultural competence.”
 - c. For example, In each case, “competence” and “responsiveness” seemed to refer to enlarging cultural knowledge bases in order to, in the words of one syllabus, “meet the needs of all... future students.” The course description in another syllabus explained, “Multiple perspectives and more complete knowledge about our world and schools are necessary” in order to “see the world and the culture in which we live from multiple perspectives.” According to another syllabus in this group, students were to “examine relevant teaching strategies and curriculum materials to meet the needs of widely diverse student populations...”
- 2) *a principal focus on pragmatic skills*
- a. An outstanding feature of these syllabi was their clear focus on pragmatic skill-building. Although these courses contained aspects of the previous approach, they tended to connect everything—self-reflection, interpersonal relations, and so on—

to curricular and pedagogical practice - culturally appropriate teaching strategies. Connecting diversity-related concerns with curriculum and instruction.

- 3) *a lack of attention to educational inequities*
 - a. direct connections between personal awareness and multicultural practice. However, they shared an inattention to educational inequities. Although several of these syllabi described the need to strengthen teaching skills to reach students from a diversity of identities, none of the 13 named the amelioration of educational inequities as an aspect of multicultural competence.

CRITICAL

Teaching in Sociopolitical Context

- 1) *a focus on critical analysis of educational policy and practice at an institutional level*
 - a. Instead, the courses described in these syllabi appeared to focus on a critical analysis of educational policy and practice at an institutional level
 - b. students would learn to “differentiate between personal and institutional discrimination, as well as the forces which either promote or inhibit equity and cultural pluralism.”
 - c. most of these syllabi connected them to systemic inequity and oppression. A learning outcome named on one syllabus declared that students would establish a knowledge base about the dynamics and selected enactations of social and school-based inequities and forms of oppression such as racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, ableism, linguicism, heterosexism/homophobia/biphobia/transphobia, religious oppression, and others
 - d. situated such examinations in a historical context, as well.
- 2) *consideration of this analysis in a larger sociopolitical context.*
 - a. placement of schooling in a larger social and political context.
 - b. Most of these syllabi included course goals or objectives focused explicitly on drawing connections between educational inequities and parallel inequities in larger society.
 - c. Such a focus was captured by a question posted on one syllabus: “Are social inequalities within the larger U.S. society reproduced in schools, and if so, how are they reproduced?”
- 3) *the engagement of critical theories.*
 - a. incorporation of critical theories into the MTE process - queer theory, feminist theory, and critical multiculturalism.
 - b. centrally concerned with engaging students in critical analysis, drawing implicitly on critical pedagogy and critical theories.
 - c. Each of these syllabi referred in some way to applying critical thinking and analysis to social and educational inequities.
 - d. A majority of these courses appeared to draw upon critical pedagogy, not simply as a content area, but as a process for MTE.

Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice

1. built largely on critical theories, to frame education in a larger sociopolitical context, and to use a systemic rather than (or in addition to) an interpersonal level of analysis.
2. *a determination to prepare teachers to resist, and to prepare their students to resist, oppression.*
3. to apply critical consciousness to counter-hegemonic teaching (rather than just understanding).
4. resistance pedagogy, were designed to help teachers or teacher candidates imagine themselves as change agents both within and outside schools—as well as to nurture this spirit in their students.
5. raised social reconstruction as a key project of multicultural education.

Appendix B

Milner's Positionality Framework

*Note that this framework comes from Milner (2007). I will use this framework to support my self-reflection, to recognize my bias, and to attempt to minimize its impact on my research. Researchers should question: (1) self (2) self in relation to others (3) how they are representing participants and (4) self in connection to a broader system (Milner, 2007).

Researching the Self

Researchers should engage in questions to bring awareness and consciousness known (seen), unknown (unseen), and unanticipated (unforeseen) issues, perspectives, epistemologies, and positions.

1. What is my racial and cultural heritage? How do I know?
2. In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world, what I emphasize in my research, and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences? How do I know?
3. How do I negotiate and balance my racial and cultural selves in society and in my research? How do I know?
4. What do I believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do I attend to my own convictions and beliefs about race and culture in my research? Why? How do I know?
5. What is the historical landscape of my racial and cultural identity and heritage? How do I know? What are and have been the contextual nuances and realities that help shape my racial and cultural ways of knowing, both past and present? How do I know?
6. What racialized and cultural experiences have shaped my research decisions, practices, approaches, epistemologies, and agendas?

Researching the Self in Relation to Others

Researchers should reflect about themselves in relation to others—communities and people involved in their research studies—and to acknowledge the multiple roles, identities, and positions that researchers and research participants bring to the research process.

1. What are the cultural and racial heritage and the historical landscape of the participants in the study? How do I know?
2. In what ways do my research participants' racial and cultural backgrounds influence how they experience the world? How do I know?
3. What do my participants believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do they and I attend to the tensions inherent in my and their convictions and beliefs about race and culture in the research process? Why? How do I know?
4. How do I negotiate and balance my own interests and research agendas with those of my research participants, which may be inconsistent with or diverge from mine? How do I know?
5. What are and have been some social, political, historical, and contextual nuances and realities that have shaped my research participants' racial and cultural ways or systems of knowing, both past and present? How consistent and inconsistent are these realities with mine? How do I know?

Engaged Reflection and Representation

Researchers should reflect with participants to think through what is happening in a particular research community, with race and culture. In cases of disagreement as to the interpretation of what is occurring in a research study, researchers' and participants' narratives are both presented as point and counterpoint or narrative and counter-narrative.

Shifting from Self to System

Researchers should also engage in questions about their self in a system.

1. What is the contextual nature of race, racism, and culture in this study? In other words, what do race, racism, and culture mean in the community under study and in the broader community? How do I know?
2. What is known socially, institutionally, and historically about the community and people under study? In other words, what does the research literature reveal about the community and people under study? And in particular what do people from the indigenous racial and cultural group write about the community and people under study? Why? How do I know?
3. What systemic and organizational barriers and structures shape the community and people's experiences, locally and more broadly? How do I know?

Appendix C

Note: This diversity statement comes from university teacher education program that is the setting for the study.

College of Education Diversity Statement

The College of Education at the University of Teaching (Pseudonym) values the identities of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We seek opportunities to provide development in the facilitation of positive interactions among our college and campus community. We support broader campus efforts that affirm equity-centered practices and value diversity in our recruitment and hiring.

The College of Education remains committed to recognizing and promoting research and innovative pedagogy that highlights dimensions of diversity. Annually, we review the portfolio of courses open to all students on a variety of topics, including human development, counseling, equitable schooling, education policy, immigration, English learners, exceptional learners, and international education. As a leading learning institution, we pursue shared goals to create an intellectually diverse academic environment.

The College of Education will consistently strive to reduce any barriers that exist across race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, dialect, health, veteran status, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and geographic regions. We welcome the contributions of groups and individuals locally and globally. We aim to ensure equitable access to our facilities, resources, and services. We endeavor to engage and develop all of our stakeholders. Our College seeks to create a robustly inclusive and inviting community.

Appendix D

IRB Acceptance Letter



1204 Marie Mount Hall
 College Park, MD 20742-5125
 TEL 301.405.4212
 FAX 301.314.1475
 irb@umd.edu
 www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE: July 20, 2023

TO: South Holden

FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1640723-1] For What Kind of Social Justice? An Examination of Four Novice Teacher Educators' Conceptions of Social Justice

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: July 20, 2023

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7.

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to final approval of this project scientific review was completed by the IRB Member reviewer.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate Amendment forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix E

IRB Recruitment Materials

Recruitment Email

Dear [doctoral student name],

I obtained your contact information with permission from the department. You are receiving this email because you are a doctoral student who is teaching a course to teachers. Doctoral students are frequently positioned as teacher educators and receive varying degrees of support in that role. There is a developing literature base on the process of becoming a teacher educator, but it has yet to tell the story of how doctoral students develop their conceptions of social justice over the course of their doctoral programs. In response to this absence, my research project will focus on telling doctoral students' stories to provide an understanding of what kinds of conceptions of social justice doctoral students have, how they developed those conceptions, and how they apply those conceptions when teaching teachers.

If you have a teaching interest that focuses on social justice or the related concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion, I would like to invite you to participate in this project as a TLPL doctoral student who has been an instructor of record. All participants must be 18 years or older.

Your participation would require the following:

- 1) One initial Survey (~30 minute) on your teaching background and definitions of terms.
- 2) 3 interviews (30-45 minutes each) in person or via Zoom (or another video conferencing software) to tell your story of how you have developed your conceptions of social justice and how you apply them when teaching.
- 3) Continued email correspondence to ensure that meaning derived from discussions are accurate.
- 4) Access to artifacts from your courses (syllabus, lesson plans, assessments, etc.) to analyze trends and themes.
- 5) Two observations (one class period each) where I will observe your teaching.

Permission to audio record is required for participation. As compensation for your time participating in the study, you will be provided with a **\$200 gift card** to the business of your choosing. If you are interested in participating in this research, please read and digitally sign the linked consent form to me and I will follow up to schedule your first interview. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

South Holden

sholden1@umd.edu

+39-328-407-7591

Appendix F

IRB Consent Form



Institutional Review Board

1204 Marie Mount Hall • 7814 Regents Drive • College Park, MD 20742 • 301-405-4212 • irb@umd.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Approaches to Social Justice Teacher Education: An Examination of Four Doctoral Student Teacher Educators' Social Justice Conceptions and Teaching Practices
Purpose of the Study	<i>This research is being conducted by South Holden, a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Megan Percy at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been in the role of teacher educator as part of your TA position and you self-identify as teaching for social justice, diversity, equity, and/or inclusion. The purpose of this research project is to examine doctoral student teacher educators' conceptions of social justice, how they develop their conceptions of social justice, and how they apply those conceptions of social justice when teaching teachers.</i>
Procedures	<i>The procedures involve you completing one Survey, 3 interviews, 2 observations, and providing lesson plans/syllabi. The Survey should last around 30 minutes and will ask about your background and definitions of social justice concepts. Each interview should last around 30 to 45 minutes and will be scheduled at a time that is mutually convenient for both you and the researcher. All interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed. There will be two observations of you teaching lessons. In addition, you will need to submit 4 lesson plans of your choosing, 4 course materials, and one syllabus the course you are teaching.</i>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<i>There are no known risks to this research. Though precautions will be taken, there is potential risk for the loss/breach of confidentiality, however efforts described in the confidentiality section will minimize this risk.</i>
Potential Benefits	<i>There are no direct benefits from participating in the research. Participating in this study may be a reflective process for you as you discuss your development as a teacher educator. I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how doctoral students develop as teacher educators.</i>

<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p><i>To protect your privacy, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer that only the principal investigator has access to.</i></p> <p><i>Transcripts from interviews and any inclusion of specific quotes in any presentation or report will use pseudonyms. The key linking your personally identifiable information to your pseudonym will be stored securely on a password-protected computer in a password-protected folder. This folder will be deleted after the study is completed.</i></p> <p><i>Audio recordings will be transcribed within a month of the recording date. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. Once transcriptions are completed, these recordings will be deleted.</i></p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
<p>Compensation</p>	<p><i>You will receive a \$200 gift card to the company of your choosing. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation.</i></p>
<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">South Holden 2311 Benjamin Building, 3942 Campus Dr. College Park, MD 20740 sholden1@umd.edu +39-328-407-7591</p>
<p>Participant Rights</p>	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:</i></p>

	https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants	
	<p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. Please place a checkmark next to all levels which you consent to participate:</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I consent to submitting artifacts to be analyzed</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I consent to completing a Survey</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I consent to participating in three audio-recorded interviews</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I consent to participating in two classroom observations</i></p> <p><i>You can email your consent by printing this form, signing by hand, and sending a scanned copy to the researcher.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix G

Initial Survey.

The Survey will be administered via GoogleForms

Demographics

1. What is your age?
2. How would you describe your gender?
3. How would you describe your race?
4. How would you describe your ethnicity?

Childhood

1. How would you describe your education experience as a student?

K-12 Experiences

1. Did you teach in K-12 in the United States? What subjects? Age group?
2. If you attended a teacher education program, did it emphasize social justice, equity, or diversity? If yes, how so?

Higher Education

1. What role(s) have you served over the course of your time as a doctoral student: instructor of record, TA, supervisor, research assistant, program support, other (please describe)?
2. What is the name of the course you are teaching this semester?
3. How did you come by these roles? Assigned? Requested?
4. What are your goals for teaching teachers?
5. What are some of the teaching practices you use when teaching teachers?

Social Justice

1. When you hear social justice - what does it make you think of? Do you see examples of that with education?

Appendix H

Interview 1.

Interview 1 will focus on participants' conceptions of social justice. It is a semi-structured focus group interview, so I will not follow the protocol exactly, but ask clarifying and follow up questions. Some questions may not be asked if they are not needed.

Interviewer: Hi, my name is South Holden, a doctoral student at the University of Maryland. I am interested in how next generation teacher educators, such as yourself, learn about teaching for social justice. You indicated that you have been pursuing social justice, equity, or diversity in your teaching. The goal of this interview is to get more information on your background and the experiences that led you to choose to teach for social justice. You do not need to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable answering. I will be recording this interview and you should expect it to last around an hour and a half. After the interview, I will provide you with the transcript to ensure its accuracy. Do you have any questions before we start?

Interviewer: The purpose of this first interview is to learn more about what it is like to be a doctoral student at this university. We are going to begin with a short drawing or photo find on what social justice means to you. Take a few minutes to draw on the paper in front of you or search for a photo that makes you think about social justice.

Interview 1: Focus Group Interview

1. Begin with a drawing of social justice - can you draw or find an image or quote that illustrates what social justice means to you?
2. Can you share your drawing?
3. How does this relate to the preparation of teachers for you?
4. How have you found teaching teachers?
5. How has it been teaching them topics related to social justice? Have you been able to achieve what you wanted to? Why or why not?
6. What could the program do to help you?
7. When was the first time you heard about social justice (equity/diversity/inclusion)?
8. What have you learned about social justice since getting to UMD?

Appendix I

Interview 2.

Interview 2 will focus on how participants developed their conceptions of social justice. Draw on previous interviews to support questioning.

Interviewer: The purpose of this second interview is to learn more about how you developed your conceptions of social justice. As in the last interview, if at any point you want to share a story, or a bit of information that you feel is important, feel free to do so.

1. How did you come to learn about social justice?
2. How has your understanding of social justice changed over time?
3. Walk me through how you came to understand frameworks XXX (from interview 1 and Survey)
 - a. Why do you think those frameworks became important to you?
 - b. Have the frameworks you use changed over time? How have they changed?
4. Walk me through how you came to develop XXX goals for teaching
 - a. Why do you think those goals became important to you?
 - b. Have your goals changed over time? How have they changed?
5. Walk me through how you came to develop XXX pedagogies for teaching
 - a. Why do you think those pedagogies became important to you?
 - b. Have your pedagogies changed over time? How have they changed?
6. What supports have you had during your development?
7. What challenges have you had during your development?

Appendix J

Observation.

The observation protocol is structured around Gorski's (2009) typology of multicultural and social justice approaches: 1) Teaching the Other 2) Teaching with cultural sensitivity 3) Teaching with multicultural competence 4) Teaching in sociopolitical context 5) Teaching as resistance counter-hegemonic practice.

I will highlight the conceptions of social justice that DSTE's mention during interviews 1 and 2 and I will assign them to one of these five approaches or to their own category (other). These will be noted on the pre-interview conceptions sheet (see example below). These 5 approaches have related practices associated with them.

During the observations, I will make note of the practices DSTE's use and the content they address. I will assign the practices to one of the 6 categories. I will discuss pedagogical reasoning during the post-observation interview to determine alignment between goals and practices, and challenges faced.

Example Observation Protocol:

Pre-Observation Conceptions

Approach	Frameworks/Theories	Goals	Practices
Teaching the 'Other' (Conservative)	Group-specific studies; cross-cultural communication; "contributions" approach DSTE's conceptions of social justice added	Prepare teachers to work with diverse student populations by learning surface-level traits, customs, and contributions of nondominant groups—often with the aim of assimilation into dominant norms.	1. Using explicit or implicit othering language that positions non-dominant groups as subordinate to Whiteness 2. Presenting non-dominant groups as homogeneous through surface-level traits or tokenized contributions (holidays, foods, famous figures) 3. Defining education through market-centric rationales (preparing teachers to 'manage' diversity for institutional or workforce demands)
Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance (Liberal)	Human relations; intergroup relations; tolerance education; cultural sensitivity; celebrating diversity; pluralism DSTE's conceptions of social justice added	Prepare teachers to enter classrooms with interpersonal awareness and tolerance for diversity, often through self-reflection on biases, without explicit engagement with systemic inequities.	1. Framing education as respecting and celebrating diversity rather than interrogating inequities 2. Emphasizing sensitivity and self-reflection as primary goals 3. Failing to connect respect for diversity or self-reflection to structural educational inequities
Teaching with Multicultural Competence (Liberal)	Multicultural competence; culturally relevant pedagogy; culturally responsive	Equip teachers with strategies and practical skills to implement inclusive curricular and	1. Centering multicultural competence as a skillset 2. Focusing on pragmatic, classroom-based strategies (e.g.,

	teaching; differentiated instruction for diverse learners DSTEs' conceptions of social justice added	pedagogical practices that engage diverse students—framed as classroom effectiveness rather than structural transformation.	lesson adaptation, differentiated instruction) 3. Avoiding explicit attention to systemic inequities or structural transformation
Teaching in Sociopolitical Context (Critical)	Critical consciousness; intersectional analysis; critical theories; critical pedagogy DSTEs' conceptions of social justice added	Engage teachers in systemic analysis of how power, oppression, and inequity shape schooling; connect classroom practice to broader sociopolitical and historical contexts, developing awareness to inform teaching.	1. Critically analyzing educational policy and practice at an institutional level within a broader sociopolitical context 2. Engaging directly with critical theories (Critical Race Theory, feminism, queer theory, critical pedagogy)
Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice (Critical)	Praxis; transformative pedagogies; humanizing pedagogy; counter-hegemonic pedagogy; educational activism DSTEs' conceptions of social justice added	Prepare teachers as change agents committed to resisting dominant ideologies and oppressive practices; apply critical consciousness through praxis; use humanizing and counter-hegemonic pedagogies to enact social reconstruction and transformation in education and beyond.	1. Employing resistance pedagogy and humanizing pedagogy grounded in social reconstruction 2. Preparing teachers (and their students) to resist and disrupt oppressive systems through praxis and collective action

Observation Notetaking Form

Time	Practice	Content	Social Justice Connection	Post Interview Notes
Time during the class that the practice occurs	The practice being used to discuss/teach the content such as modeling, cases, reflection, lecturing etc.	What is being discussed/taught	Social justice connection to one of the conceptions from the list above (or a new concept)	Notes about pedagogical reasoning that DSTEs discuss with regards to why they chose a certain practice and connection to social justice (if any).

Post-Interview for Observation

Questions during post interviews focus on the pedagogical reasoning that the DSTE had:

1. What led you to approach the lesson by doing XXXX (mention practices used)?
2. What elements of social justice were you focusing on?
3. What would you have done differently if you could have done anything (ideal lesson)?
4. What was preventing them from doing that (challenges)?

Appendix K

Interview 3.

Interview 3 will focus on how DSTE's apply their conceptions of social justice in practice. I will draw on documents and observations to discuss examples of DSTE's applying conceptions in practice.

Interviewer: The purpose of this third interview is to learn more about the teaching practices you use in your classroom. As in the last interview, if at any point you want to share a story, or a bit of information that you feel is important, feel free to do so.

1. How do you teach XXX in your classroom? (Topics to include social justice, equity, oppression etc.)
2. How do you integrate conceptions of social justice into your syllabi?
3. How do you integrate conceptions of social justice into your lesson plans?
4. Follow up questions to observations and documents (lesson plans and syllabi).
 - a. Discuss examples of social justice in lesson plans and syllabi
 - b. Clarify thought processes and connection to conceptions of social justice

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