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Analyzing Social Justice Teaching in Elementary Curriculum and Teacher Implementation in a
White, Rural, Working Class School District

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ABSTRACT

“Education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice” (Arne Duncan). The ability to recognize privilege within ourselves and understand oppression is at the center of social justice, yet is often overlooked in school districts with majority white students. Through this study, the author analyzes elementary standards and highlights the understandings and experiences of three third grade teachers from Clearfield Elementary School. The author seeks to determine how white teachers in a white, rural, working class area interpret concepts of diversity and justice. The study specifically examines the historical views of race in America and the importance of social justice teaching in education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Why History is Important	2
Teaching Real History	3
History of Race in America	4
Chapter 2 Funding in Education	5
Equality, Equity, and Justice.....	7
Diversity of Curriculum and Literacy.....	8
Chapter 3 The Importance of Diversity in Education.....	10
The Myth of Colorblindness.....	10
Critical Race Theory.....	11
Chapter 4 Pennsylvania State Standards.....	12
Demographics of Teachers and Students in Clearfield, PA.....	14
Chapter 5	16
Methodology	16
Chapter 6 Discussion	17
Barriers to Engaging in Social Justice Teaching	19
Chapter 7.....	21
Implications for Teaching.....	21

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Pennsylvania Third Grade Social Studies Standards..... 12

Chapter 1

Introduction

It has been more than 150 years since the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in which all enslaved people were declared free. It was two and a half years later before emancipation was announced in Texas on Juneteenth, the day now celebrated as the end of slavery in the United States. However, the Jim Crow Era bound them back into a caste system riddled with inequality. Although the old Jim Crow laws are dead, there is a dark and ugly reality today of systemic barriers and institutionalized racism in place against Black people and People of Color. Education has always been seen as the great equalizer; however, the education system itself is riddled with inequalities, oppression and exclusion. There is a reality lurking in the shadows: the resegregation of our schools and the direct impact it has on the future of our democratic society. Although teachers do not have the sole ability to equalize funding, or change the diversity of students in schools, they do have the power to decide how curriculum is taught and address biases in their own classroom. In an ever-changing nation, it is the job of teachers to create an environment where students feel comfortable to have conversations about race, teach students about multicultural figures and teach anti-racist curriculum. By using social studies education as a social justice tool, teachers can lead students to learn how to think critically, creatively and effectively to become agents of change. Too often social studies curriculum is written from the white male point of view and too often students only learn about Black figures during Black History Month.

Through this thesis, I aim to analyze elementary social studies standards and interview third grade teachers to determine how white teachers in a white, rural, working class area teach concepts of diversity and equity.

It is important to share my demographics. I am White and female; therefore, I cannot successfully discuss this topic without acknowledging the function of race and Whiteness in my own life. However, through this thesis, I hope to encourage teachers and future teachers to emphasize diversity and social justice teaching in their classroom as well as encourage policy makers and curriculum creators to look at American history through different perspectives.

Why History is Important

History is not only what and why things have happened in the past, but also how historical events have shaped the world and society we see today. In other words, “History expresses who we are, but it also reveals who we must become” (Menkart, 2004). Gary B. Nash stated that, “History is unceasingly controversial because it provides so much of the substance for the way a society defines itself and considers what it wants to be.” However, history is constantly evolving because the context of these events and perspectives on the past change. Learning history in school is critical in order to evaluate our society and learn from the many mistakes we have made because, “Continuously reexamining the past, rather than piously repeating traditional narratives, is the greatest service historians can render in a democracy” (Nash, 2000). Understanding our past can give students an understanding of the present. For example, the history of enslavement gives insight into the institutionalized and systemic racism in society today. “By helping students to understand how oppression operates both individually

and institutionally, they are better positioned not only to understand their own lived experiences but also to develop strategic solutions based on historical roots rather than romanticized or missionary notions of social change” (Lee, 2003). When students understand history, and are taught about race in our country, they will be able to recognize and confront biases within themselves and others.

Teaching Real History

Throughout America, many students are taught an oversimplified, one-dimensional, Eurocentric version of history. Often, historical figures are seen as heroes that could do no wrong which feeds into the master narrative and glosses over the nuances of history. For example, the founding fathers are seen as heroes of our country, and although they were influential figures in American history, it is a disservice to students to put them on a pedestal and ignore flaws that would be illuminated with a critical lens. When talking about the civil rights movement, it is harmful to only discuss Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks because “placing so much emphasis on national leadership and national institutions minimizes the importance of local struggle and makes it difficult to appreciate the role ‘ordinary’ people played in changing the country” (Menkart, 2004). When students are able to critically think about American history, they will start to see it as a multidimensional story filled with many people and many perspectives.

History of Race in America

Unlike the narrative in most history textbooks, American history cannot be categorized as “good” or “bad”, but rather as a series of complex events, filled with both celebrations and struggles. Most often, the struggles in our history are due to power. The struggle for power is tied to land, money, and political issues. Often, these struggles are based on classifications of groups of people according to their gender, religion, or race. Race is a social construct used to categorize and divide people; however, racial classifications did not always exist. "Americans of European descent invented race during the era of the American Revolution as a way of resolving the contradiction between a natural right to freedom and the fact of slavery" (Fields, 2003). Since then, race has been used as a way to divide, oppress, and hold onto power.

Chapter 2

Funding in Education

Since the start of education in America, funding of public schools has been a local and state responsibility, while the federal government provides assistance to the states. This is due to the fact that the U.S. constitution does not mention the need for public education. The state provides 47.9% of revenue, 45% is provided by local taxes and 7.1% is allocated by the federal government (Howell, 2017). However, there are major variations in the revenue raising and spending policies across states. The states receive funding from sales taxes and income taxes while the local government receives most money from property taxes, taxes that localities require individuals and businesses to pay on the property they own (Howell, 2017). However, the reliance on property taxes has created immense inequities in per-pupil funding and in local property tax rates (Howell, 2017). Wealthier districts, due to high property tax rates, have the ability to spend more per pupil on education than poorer districts, even when poorer districts are being taxed at a higher rate.

The history of why property tax is used to fund schools starts in Massachusetts. Massachusetts was the first colony to make education a public responsibility. The English Puritans believed that the well-being of the colony was the responsibility of the community, and that well-being was dependent upon being able to read the bible. Therefore, in 1642, the first education law was passed that required children to learn to read and write. In 1647, a second law was passed requiring the communities to establish and maintain public schools (Gelbrich, 1999). The founding fathers taxed property as a way to fund these public schools because they believed the wealthy should pay for education. A person's land was previously used as the main

determinant of wealth. By the end of the 19th century, funding schools through property taxes became widespread because families were living in communities that had similar standards of living. Funding schools with property taxes has become a tradition that is still in place to this day, but has led to inequity in education spending and disadvantages for low-socioeconomic districts.

Because of these inequalities of funding, states have used basic aid and equalization aid to try to mitigate the differences across districts. Basic aid, seen in two-thirds of states, are foundation programs in which the states ensure a minimum amount of money per- student to all districts, no matter their property taxes (Howell, 2017). Equalization aid can be used in conjunction with basic aid to equalize district spending in order to compensate for lower district property tax resources (Howell, 2017). However, equalization aid is only provided in 20 states. In a school finance system, it is imperative that each school gets: a foundation level of funding per student, equalization aid so that poor districts are not taxed at a higher rate, and a program to ensure that higher- spending districts don't lose the funding and resources that they currently have (Howell, 2017). While some states have made progress in addressing the vast funding inequalities between schools, unequal access still exists. Students in poverty cost more to educate due to the increased need of resources. Yet, many areas with concentrated economic disadvantaged students receive less funding than wealthy districts (Katz, 2020).

The Honorable Sonia Sotomayor stated that “until we get equal education, we won't have an equal society.” The educational opportunity of each student should not be determined by where they live, their race, gender, or their socioeconomic status. Although this might be a widely agreed upon philosophy in America, our educational system and school funding system does not reflect this objective. The educational spending in each school does have an effect on

the outcomes of student achievement. If policies are put into place where barriers to academic excellence do not occur, maybe a more equitable society and school system would be possible.

Equality, Equity, and Justice

The terms equality, equity and justice are often used interchangeably; however, there is an important distinction, especially when discussing education. Equality describes when every student is given the same resources and support. In theory, this seems adequate; however, this theory assumes that everyone will benefit from the same support and resources, when in reality some students have more systemic barriers to overcome than others.

Equity in education refers to each student getting the support they need in order to achieve a certain outcome. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2001 with the hope to create a more equitable school system. NCLB required that all schools make “adequate yearly progress” in reading and math on state tests in order to continue to receive federal funding (Powell, 2018). This emphasis on standardized testing was thought to improve accountability to all schools and make sure that all students receive the same quality education. In reality, standardized testing does not lead to increases in student achievement. Although equity takes into account the differences of each student, it assumes the goal is the same for each student and measures success as doing well on standardized tests. This leads to questions about what success really means.

In a perfect world, we should strive for justice instead of equity, where systemic barriers and causes of inequity are removed. Equality, equity and justice are seemingly similar; however, the nuanced differences orient thinking about policy in important ways. An article from the

Forum of the American Journal of Education written by Joseph Levitan explains justice in education best.

“In contrast to equality and equity, a *just education* is focused on ensuring that each student has the opportunities to find, figure out, and develop their skills and abilities based on their values and their communities’ values. A just education does not assume the same means or the same ends for every student. Instead, it is oriented around the value of liberty and the pursuit of one’s own goals by ensuring that students are prepared to make informed, knowledgeable decisions and have the skills and understandings necessary to achieve *their* goals. It is about seeing students as agents in their own education who have rights and inherent abilities. Finally, implicit in the idea of justice is that education is about ensuring that historical *injustices* are addressed, such as a historical lack of access to quality education faced by poor and marginalized students” (Levitan, 2016).

As teachers, we have the opportunity to make powerful decisions in the way that we teach our students and we can do it in a way that is just for all students.

Diversity of Curriculum and Literacy

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 50.8 million students attended public elementary, middle, and high schools across America in 2018. Of those 50.8 million students, 27 million are non-white (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). That is 53% of the students going to public schools. If the school curriculum and books that

students are reading are mainly white focused, we are not representing or learning about more than half of our students' backgrounds.

There are two main terms that people use when referring to diverse curriculum: multicultural curriculum and anti-racist curriculum. Although they are both referring to diverse curriculums, they have very different outcomes. Multicultural education has come to be known for the dance, dialect, dress, and dinner model, which looks at culture, race and ethnicity in a superficial manner. Anti-racist education on the other hand is a perspective that cuts across all subjects and addresses the histories and experiences of people who have been left out of the traditional curriculum. In addition, it equips "students, parents and teachers with tools needed to combat racism and ethnic discrimination, and to find ways to build a society that includes all people on an equal footing" (Lee, 2003).

Another way to create an inclusive classroom, is to choose literature in the library that reflects all races and ethnicities. Children's books have an important role in a child's education because books have the power to influence who children see as "important", who matters and books can influence how children view the world. Anti-bias books are books in which the main character is part of a marginalized group. However, Anti-bias books don't just refer to race. They also include gender, religion, sexuality, family structure and socio-economic status. It is so important for children to see themselves represented in books as well as to see people who are not like themselves.

As teachers, we have the power to shape how students see the world and that needs to include all races and ethnicities. It is crucial to have open conversations with students about race and ethnicity, using books as a way to start that conversation, and incorporating units of study on race and ethnicity in all subject areas.

Chapter 3

The Importance of Diversity in Education

Desmond Tutu states: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”. This quote clearly identifies the idea that neutrality itself is a political choice. Many teachers believe that the classroom should be a neutral space without politics; however, I argue that the classroom is a complex political space. Even when teachers consciously attempt to be politically neutral in their classroom, they are still making hundreds of political choices about what they display in their classroom, their attitudes towards holidays and what perspectives they teach. “A teacher’s approach to talking about social issues can shape the opinions children have about those issues” (Hollingworth, 2009). It is important to make the distinction that teaching is inherently political, not partisan, but political.

The Myth of Colorblindness

Throughout American history, there have been different attitudes and perspectives on race that are constantly changing. One of the widespread views of Americans was racial colorblindness. Racial colorblindness stemmed from the civil rights movement in the 1950s- 60s and many people today still have this view on race. According to the American Psychological Association, “A color-blind racial perspective embodies the view that the United States has moved beyond race and racism and that the color of someone’s skin does not matter in today’s society” (Neville, 2016). However, racial disparities in education, poverty, and incarceration are still prevalent in America today. It is a disservice to students and all citizens to pretend that disparities do not exist. We cannot fix these disparities if people do not believe they exist. Some

believe that children should not be taught about race, but “by kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes held by adults in our culture. They have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others” (Kinzler, 2016). It is critical that teachers recognize the damage that colorblind views can have on their students.

Critical Race Theory

More recently, there has been a shift to start thinking about race through the perspective of history. Critical race theory, established in the 1970s, “offers a way of seeing the world that helps people recognize the effects of historical racism in modern American life. The intellectual movement behind the idea was started by legal scholars as a way to examine how laws and systems uphold and perpetuate inequality for traditionally marginalized groups” (Lang, 2020). This idea that America is built on a racist foundation should be used as a tool in schools in order to explore how Black people are still affected by our history. In addition, it will help teachers develop the language used in the classroom, using vocabulary such as “white privilege”, “intersectionality”, and “micro aggressions”.

The most important thing to do as a teacher no matter what subject taught, is to connect with students and use students’ experiences as well as the community to adapt the way we teach. Students should become active participants, and agents of change within their education and community. When we bring diverse perspectives to education, we can create an environment where students feel they can be curious and valued in the educational setting which in turn leads to a just education.

Chapter 4

Pennsylvania State Standards

Clearfield Area Elementary School does not currently have a social studies curriculum. This creates a lot of variety in the topics that are taught and teachers have to rely on the state standards as a guide. The Pennsylvania state standards for social studies are separated into four categories: civics and government, economics, geography, and history.

Table 1. Pennsylvania Third Grade Social Studies Standards

<i>Code</i>	<i>Standard</i>
5.1.3.A	Explain the purposes of rules, laws, and consequences.
5.1.3.B	Explain rules and laws for the classroom, school, and community.
5.1.3.C	Define the principles and ideals shaping local government. Liberty/ Freedom, Democracy, Justice, Equality.
5.1.3.D	Identify key ideas about government found in significant documents: Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution, Bill of Rights, Pennsylvania Constitution.
5.1.3.F	Identify state symbols, national symbols, and national holidays.
5.2.3.A	Identify personal rights and responsibilities.
5.2.3.B	Identify the source of conflict and disagreement and different ways conflict can be resolved.
5.2.3.C	Identify leadership and public service opportunities in the school, community, state, and nation.
5.2.3.D	Describe how citizens participate in school and community activities.
5.3.3.A	Identify the roles of the three branches of government.
5.3.3.B	Identify how laws are made in the local community.
5.3.3.C	Identify services performed by the local governments
5.3.3.D	Identify positions of authority at school and community.
5.3.3.E	Explain the purpose for elections.
5.3.3.F	Explain how an action may be just or unjust.
5.3.3.G	Identify individual interests and explain ways to influence others.
6.1.3.A	Define scarcity and identify examples of resources, wants and needs.
6.1.3.B	Identify needs and wants of people. Identify examples of natural, human and capital resources.
6.1.3.C	Explain what is given up when making a choice.
6.1.3.D	Identify reasons why people make a choice.
6.2.3.A	Identify goods, services, consumers, and producers in the local community.
6.2.3.B	Identify competing sellers in the local market.
6.2.3.C	Identify types of advertising designed to influence personal choice.
6.2.3.D	Define price and how prices vary for products.
6.2.3.E	Describe the effect of local businesses opening and closing.
6.2.3.F	Identify private economic institutions.
6.2.3.G	Identify characteristics of the local economy.

6.3.3.A	Identify goods and services provided by the government.
6.3.3.B	Identify examples of government involvement in local economic activities.
6.3.3.C	Define tax and explain the relationship between taxation and government services.
6.4.3.A	Identify local examples of specialization and division of labor.
6.4.3.B	Identify examples of trade, imports, and exports in the local community.
6.5.3.A	Explain why people work.
6.5.3.B	Identify different occupations.
6.5.3.E	Identify tangible and intangible assets.
6.5.3.G	Define saving and explain why people save.
6.5.3.H	Identify the role of banks in our local community.
7.1.3.A	Identify how basic geographic tools are used to organize and interpret information about people, places and environment.
7.1.3.B	Identify and locate place and regions as defined by physical and human features.
7.2.3.A	Identify the physical characteristics of places and regions.
7.2.3.B	Identify the basic physical processes that affect the physical characteristics of places and regions.
7.3.3.A	Identify the human characteristics of places and regions using the following criteria: population, culture, settlement, economic activities, political activities.
7.4.3.A	Identify the effect of the physical systems on people within a community.
7.4.3.B	Identify the effect of people on the physical systems within a community.
8.1.3.A	Identify the difference between past, present and future using timelines and/or other graphic representations.
8.1.3.B	Identify fact, opinion, multiple points of view, and primary resources as related to historical events.
8.1.3.C	Conduct teacher guided inquiry on assigned topics using specific historical sources.
8.2.3.A	Identify the social, political, cultural, and economic contributions of individuals and groups from Pennsylvania.
8.2.3.B	Identify historical documents, artifacts, and places critical to Pennsylvania History.
8.2.3.C	Identify and describe how continuity and change have impacted Pennsylvania history. Belief systems and religions, commerce and industry, technology, politics and government, physical and human geography, social organizations.
8.2.3.D	Identify and describe how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations have impacted the history and development of Pennsylvania. Ethnicity and race, working conditions, immigration, military conflict, economic stability.
8.3.3.A	Identify and describe the social, political, cultural, and economic contributions of individuals and groups in United States history.
8.3.3.B	Identify and describe historical documents, artifacts, and places critical to United States history.
8.3.3.C	Identify and describe how continuity and change have impacted U.S. history.
8.3.3.D	Identify and describe how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations have impacted the history and development of the US.
8.4.3.A	Identify the elements of culture and ethnicity.
8.4.3.B	Identify the importance of artifacts and sites to different cultures and ethnicities.
8.4.3.C	Compare and contrast selected world cultures.
8.4.3.D	Identify conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations from around the world.

There are no growth measures or standardized social studies tests in Pennsylvania which makes it hard to know the level of growth for students in the district and the state. When analyzing the standards, it is clear that there are standards that could be used to teach social justice teaching. Standard 5.1.3.C asks the students to “define the principles and ideals shaping local government. Liberty/ Freedom, Democracy, Justice, Equality.” Standard 5.3.3.F. asks students to “Explain how an action may be just or unjust.” Standard 8.1.3.B asks students to “Identify fact, opinion, multiple points of view, and primary resources as related to historical events.” Standard 8.4.3.A asks students to “Identify the elements of culture and ethnicity.” Although there are some standards that address the systematic barriers in place for People of Color and Black history, it is up to the teacher to decide what to include in their lessons and how they describe history to students. All of these standards provide teachers an opportunity to talk about race in American history and how it has affected our world today. However, it brings up a vital question. How are teachers actually implementing these standards into their teaching?

Demographics of Teachers and Students in Clearfield, PA

Clearfield Area Elementary school is a public school in Clearfield, PA located in rural, central Pennsylvania. According to The National Center for Education Statistics, Clearfield Elementary School has 1,145 students in grades K-6 with 1,097 White students, 29 students who are two or more races, 8 Hispanic students, 5 Asian students, 5 Black students and 1 Native American student. Clearfield has a student- teacher ratio of 13:1 with 91 teachers in the school and similar demographics as the students.

Clearfield is a Title 1 school meaning they receive additional federal funding because 59% of the students come from a low-income family. The Title 1 program allows the school to have more resources such as math and English language arts (ELA) specialists and gives every student free breakfast and lunch. According to state tests, 42% of students are proficient in math and 58% of students are proficient in reading.

The Clearfield School District has a population of 18,647 with 98% of people being White and 1% Hispanic. The median income per household is \$45,963. 13% of the population is in poverty and 14% of the population has a Bachelor's degree or higher (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Two of the main employers in Clearfield are the school district and the Walmart distribution center.

Chapter 5

Methodology

Social justice education may be overlooked, but is essential in a majority white school district that lacks diversity such as Clearfield. In a rapidly changing world, it is no longer a question of whether a person will interact with someone of a different social identity, but rather when it will happen. Within this climate, people need to be taught how to interact with people of different backgrounds, opinions, and perspectives. Through social justice teaching, students will learn about the systemic barriers for members of minoritized groups, and determine what their response should be to the obstacles. The unfortunate reality is that teachers are not prepared to teach social justice education, and there is little to no support from the community and administration.

Through interviews and analysis of social justice education in rural white schools, I aim to develop a better understanding of how prepared teachers feel to teach social justice education and if it is encouraged by the community and administration, as well as how social justice teaching is specifically implemented into the school day. A qualitative, case study approach was used so that the various perspectives of these teachers could be examined to describe the complexities of their understandings about teaching for social justice. Although this study has a narrow view of just three teachers in one school district, specific information was collected that might have been overlooked in quantitative studies looking for generalizable knowledge. The information was mainly gathered through interviews. A qualitative research interview has been defined as, “a conversation with a purpose” (Mason, 2018). The interviews were semi-structured with initial questions to spark conversation.

Chapter 6

Discussion

In order to analyze teachers' understanding of teaching of social justice, in-depth interviews with three teachers were conducted in which participants were asked about social justice and applications in their classroom. For the purposes of this thesis, the teachers will stay anonymous and will be referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3, in order to allow them to speak freely about their experiences.

Teacher 1 has been teaching for 14 years. She grew up in Clearfield, PA and is now teaching at Clearfield Area Elementary. When asked if race should be discussed in elementary classrooms, she strongly responded that race should be talked about in an elementary classroom. When asking follow up questions, it was clear that although she felt it essential for race to be talked about, there are many variables and obstacles that make conversations about race confined to holidays and rare discussions. "Around President's Day, we talk about Abraham Lincoln, so then we talk about the Civil War, and slavery. Then we talk about the color of people's skin, if that really matters, and how we should accept someone with darker skin. We have had some pretty good discussions. We have also talked about it on Martin Luther King Day". The teacher emphasized that she talks about race with the aim of acceptance.

When asked about support by the community and district, Teacher 1 mentioned that social justice teaching and equity is not explicitly talked about by the school or district or administration. However, she assumes that the administration knows teachers tackle topics about race in class. It is on the teacher's shoulders to provide resources and decide what to cover.

Teacher 1 took a multicultural education class in college where she explored how to integrate race into a primarily white class. She went into inner city schools and learned about

what issues they are facing as a primarily black community. She said “it was a good eye opener for people living in rural, white counties.”

The polarizing political space that has emerged in the past few years does not go unnoticed by teachers. “Maybe it’s just in my head, but I am more aware that I might get parent backlash.” Teacher 1 has to tread lightly and decides to teach diversity to achieve acceptance. She constantly has to ask herself questions such as: “How far do I go?” and “Who is going to have a comment about it?” She acknowledges that she could do more, but wants to be aware of the conservative environment in which she works.

Teacher 2 has been teaching for 7 years at Clearfield Elementary and grew up in the Clearfield area. Her college did not specifically teach about equity or diversity in education. She was the only teacher interviewed who had any students of color in their class. Teacher 2 has two half black students in her class. Whenever race comes up naturally in conversation, “It usually ends at: We are all equal and should treat each other the way that we want to be treated. It doesn’t matter your gender or skin color.” She mentioned that they do not have too many natural opportunities to talk about race in the classroom and she doesn’t go out of her way to discuss “anything too controversial that teachers in a more metro area might go out of their way to teach.” Similar to Teacher 1, she said nothing is required by the school administration or curriculum and there isn’t any guidance on how to talk about race or what to teach. Teachers are nervous about the backlash that they might face from parents, “Even if we are teaching it in the most secular, non-biased way.” It is hard for teachers to teach social studies since there is no curriculum. Even when Teacher 2 was a student at Clearfield, the social studies curriculum was more focused on history, geography, and economics from a Eurocentric lens rather than social issues.

Teacher 3 also grew up in Clearfield and has now been teaching for 14 years. She doesn't have any students of color in her class this year, but still believes that race should be talked about. She mentioned Martin Luther King Day as a time where there are discussions about race and the civil rights movement. However, she finds it hard that there is no guide for what curriculum should be taught in social studies.

Barriers to Engaging in Social Justice Teaching

Through these interviews, I was able to get a better understanding of how race is discussed in the classrooms at Clearfield and if teachers feel supported. There are many parallels between how each of the teachers feels about social studies and race and the barriers they face. The lens of looking at race through acceptance was a topic that all three teachers talked about. It is important to talk about acceptance of differences at the elementary level especially in an overwhelmingly White district. However, this view should not be the only thing discussed because it does not tie in social justice or equity into learning.

Since Clearfield is a rural, white, and conservative area, the fear of negative parent feedback is always in the back of teachers' minds. With the COVID-19 pandemic effecting schools and limiting direct personal contact, parents instead use social media as an outlet to voice their strong opinions. Teachers don't want to cross a line and teach anything that would result in backlash in a public forum.

Fewer than half of students in America are White, yet four out of five teachers are White. Research has shown that students of color achieve better with a teacher of color. All of the

teachers I interviewed were white and had grown up in the Clearfield area. I believe this factor contributed to the limited discussions of race in their classroom.

There has been a big shift in the past few years to heavily focus on high- stakes testing of ELA and math, leaving little to no time for social studies and science. Students are missing out on a well- rounded education that includes social justice education. If the purpose of education is to support critical thinking, creativity and teach how to be a positive citizen, then social studies and social justice education is vital.

Through the interviews in Clearfield, it became apparent that racial justice is seen as a controversial topic. This is a detrimental way to think about race for both students of color and white students. It is easier to think of the classroom as a safe space, a place that is unaffected by the outside world. However, when racial justice is ignored, it dehumanizes students of color. White students will get the idea that those topics are not important. Teachers should address topics such as race in history and current events, and students should have a space to process their emotions and empower students to take action.

Chapter 7

Implications for Teaching

When social studies in the elementary classroom is seen as more than just learning facts and dates, when it is also seen as a tool to teach justice, students can be inspired to become agents of change and positive citizens in our democratic society. In order to do this, teachers need to be educated on the best ways to teach history. However, the majority of white, middle class people who enter the field of education have limited understandings about race and its implications in society. This was confirmed through the interviews with three teachers in a majority white, rural, working class district. On a district and administration level, there should be professional development opportunities led by people of color for teachers on the subject of social justice education. Although these three interviews cannot be generalized to all teachers in America or even all teachers in rural areas, the information gathered from these interviews can be used as a reminder for teachers to analyze their own teaching and their implementation of justice teaching in social studies. The future of society is sitting in our classrooms and when all students are able to learn about the true history of our country, and learn about social justice issues, our country will be filled with change makers.

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ACADEMIC VITA

EMILY JENSEN

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University **University Park, PA**
Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education August 2017 - May 2021
Minor in Education and Public Policy
Schreyer Honors College Student
Dean's List 7/8 semesters so far 2017-2020

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Student Teaching Fall 2020- Spring 2021
Clearfield Elementary School, PA

- Created and taught engaging lessons in a third-grade class in the core subject areas both in person and virtual over zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Assisted in establishing a classroom learning environment that was encouraging, and adaptive to student needs.

Our Children's Center Montessori Spring 2019

- Observed and taught lessons in a preschool Montessori classroom.

Brooksfield Pre-school Summer Camp Counselor Summer 2018, 2019

- Led a group of 1st graders ('18) and preschoolers ('19).
- Created and organized games, crafts and activities for the children and created a safe environment.

Volunteer Tutoring 2018, 2019

- Assisted a middle schooler develop math skills once a week.
- Allowed growth in individual teaching skills as well as building relationships with students.

Jamestown Elementary Play: Grades: K-5 December 2013 – March 2017
High School Director

- Led 20 elementary students in creating the set and costumes for a theatre production each school year.

LEADERSHIP & AWARDS

Penn State Blue Band (Marching Band) (August 2017 – May 2021)
Section Leader

- Selected to be a section leader for 24 members of the clarinet section junior and senior year. Built confidence in leadership abilities while fostering a positive environment and helping members grow their music and drill skills.

Schreyer Honors College (2017-2021)

- Successfully completed a total of 39 honors credit classes.

Schreyer Honors College Thesis

- Honors Thesis analyzing diversity in elementary social studies curriculum and how teachers implement social justice teaching in a white, rural, working class community.

Jeanne Leonhard Scholarship in Education (2017-2021)

- Scholarship given to superior full-time undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education.