Changing the World, One Teacher at a Time

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Breathe For Change

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Chapter One

Introduction

What Is Teaching for Social Justice?

To me, teaching for social justice gives a voice to those who have been, or who currently are, silenced. It's about showing all sides of the story. It's about teaching love and acceptance. It's about teaching peace and tolerance. It's about proving that wit, passion and solidarity can overtrump money. It's about inspiring students to question the status quo and change their future when a biased minority attempts to run the majority. *It's about fighting for basic human rights.* On a daily basis, we must fight for students of every ethnicity, gender, culture, sexuality, socio-economic status, religious or non-religious affiliation, language, beliefs and backgrounds. Beyond this, we must teach them to continue to fight for each other.

—Lauren, Reflection, August 2014

I consider social justice to be fundamental to my teaching practice. It is why I teach, and also how I teach. A big part of this, I think, is accepting my students exactly where they're at. Another important part of teaching for social justice to me is providing my students with the exact same high-quality early childhood education that their counterparts are receiving a zip code away. I am very aware of the generational poverty, institutional racism, and other socio-political barriers my students and their families face. But none of that should impact the kind of education I provide for them.

—Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014

Teaching for social justice, to me, means doing *what is best for a student,* instead of doing what is best for your official evaluation. It means reaching out to a family that has historically had poor relationships with teachers and might be considered "bad for the community." It means not listening to somebody who tells you that there will always be three students in your class that you have to allow to fall through the cracks because how else are you going to teach everything you have to teach? Teaching for social justice means that teachers should not fear trusting their own instincts or professional judgments because the standards don't allow for that kind of deviation. *Teaching for social justice is what inspired me to teach in the first place, and yet it is what I am currently afraid to do.*

—Marissa, Reflection, October 2014

These three first year teachers have a lot in common. They attended the same social justice-oriented teacher education program, and they all refer to themselves as "social justice educators." Like the majority of teachers in the United States, they are white, English-speaking females from middle- or upper-class families and teach predominantly non-white students from low-income communities (Banks, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Souto-Manning, 2013). Gomez (1994) argues that this mismatch between the monolithic teaching workforce and their culturally and linguistically diverse students—often referred to as "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006)—is highly problematic. To address this cultural gap, education scholars have called attention to the critical need for teacher education programs to prepare new educators to teach for social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Nieto, 2000; Picower, 2007).

Yet, as these teachers' wide-ranging definitions of social justice suggest, there is a large variance in how novice teachers make sense of what it means to "teach for social justice." This is important, because teachers' beliefs significantly impact their teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Pajares, 1992). Therefore, how teachers come to understand and identify with the meaning of social justice during their teacher preparation has profound implications for their students and school communities. Although many teacher education programs claim to prepare teachers for social justice, there has been little consensus across programs about what this concept means, and how to help teacher candidates understand and enact social justice pedagogies in the classroom (North, 2008; Zeichner, 2009).

These conflicting discourses reflect some of the current tensions among scholars in the education field. However, paying too much attention to the critiques of social justice education is problematic. Wise (2007) reminds us not to let the theoretical debate among scholars inhibit us

as a field from embracing the "the spirit of social justice." Marissa, Lauren, and Elizabeth are living examples of that spirit of social justice, which holds real value in new teachers' lives. Their words above reflect their deep commitment to addressing issues of inequity (e.g., "Teaching for social justice is what inspired me to teach in the first place," "I consider social justice to be fundamental to my teaching practice. It is why I teach and also how I teach," etc.). Their collective vision for social justice shows that, despite its ambiguity among scholars, the ideals underlying the term "social justice" have shaped, and continue to shape, pre-service and new teachers' identities, perspectives, pedagogies and senses of purpose.

Picower (2007) strongly encourages teacher educators to create opportunities to support graduates—like Marissa, Lauren, and Elizabeth—as they begin their teaching journey. "For those of us concerned with teaching for social justice," she states, "it is mandatory that we support early educators who share these concerns as they struggle not to give into the pressure to abandon their commitments to equity that brought them into the profession" (Picower, 2007, p. 20). Despite this need, few studies have actually followed pre-service teachers into their classrooms to explore how they negotiate challenges and implement critical multicultural pedagogies within the currently standardized system (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010; Borrero, 2009; Puig & Recchia, 2012; Whipp, 2013). This calls attention to an emerging area of inquiry in educational research. Gaining insight into the complex experiences of new teachers as they attempt to teach for equity will open up new spaces for teacher educators to reimagine learning opportunities that help prospective teachers live out their visions for social justice in action.

In this chapter, I begin by situating my research study within the context of current discourses on teacher education and social justice. I then discuss the complexities and ethical underpinnings of my role as a researcher, and acknowledge the ways in which my multiple roles in the participants' lives informed my methodological choices. Next, I describe the organic process by which my research study developed within a social justice-oriented teacher education program, and locate myself as the researcher within this context. Finally, I discuss how my exploration of these questions led me to an evolved understanding of the challenges new teachers face—and informed a transformation of my research to not only include how teachers *think* about social justice, but also how to empower them to *act* upon their ideals and overcome the stress and burnout endemic in our current education system.

Purpose of the Inquiry

> If I am not in the world simply to adapt to it, but rather transform it, and if it is not possible to change the world without a certain dream or vision for it, I must make use of every possibility there is not only to speak about my utopia, but also to engage in practices consistent with it.
>
> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, 2005

My dissertation explores how eight first year teachers who graduated from a top university's social justice-oriented teacher education program negotiate and enact critical multicultural perspectives in diverse early childhood and elementary classrooms. Within the context of our co-constructed community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998), I encouraged these teachers—whom I had previously taught and supervised for two years—to engage in personal

and collective reflection with the goal of understanding how they think about social justice and translate these thoughts into action. This community of practice began in August 2014, and connected new teachers across diverse educational contexts, supporting their efforts to implement and sustain social justice pedagogies.

The purpose of this project transcends research. It is about relationships. It is about creating opportunities for teachers to fully express their authentic perspectives alongside others who want to listen and contribute. It is about acknowledging the experiences of new teachers whose voices are increasingly silenced within current educational discourses that focus on standardization and one-size-fits-all models of education (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). It is about unveiling the complexities in every teacher's narrative. It is about using education as a vehicle for social change or, as bell hooks (1994) says, as "the practice of freedom" (p. 4). It is about understanding the experiences and insights of teachers in their struggle to teach for social justice. Ultimately, it is about a collective commitment to embodying social justice principles.

These teachers felt called to participate in this year-long journey because they longed for a space not just to speak about their utopias, but to actively give and receive support as they worked towards translating their intentions into action in classrooms across the world. Together, we realized that unless we take a stand for social justice on both the individual and systemic levels, the disparities between rich and poor, black and white, and abled and disabled will further perpetuate (Nieto, 2000; Shakman et al., 2007). Teacher shortages, failing schools, and limited resources will continue to hamper our nation's ability to help children reach their fullest potential. Test scores will continue to be prioritized over social-emotional learning, letter grades over human relationships, and individualism over the collective community.

Okri (1997) suggests that, "If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives" (p. 22). By weaving together the stories new teachers tell throughout their first year teaching, I intend to illuminate both the possibilities and challenges teachers face as they seek to improve their teaching and their lives (Souto-Manning, 2013). Through sharing their perspectives, I hope to open up new spaces in the field for teacher educators and teachers to reimagine learning opportunities that better prepare prospective and new teachers to translate their socially just ideals into authentic experiences with children in the classroom.

Research Questions

Originally, my goal as a researcher was to understand how teachers inform and enact their ideas about social justice as they transition from teacher education into the classroom. Specifically, I set out to explore the following questions:

- How do new teachers describe their own personal stories of becoming social justice educators?
    - How do these stories transform throughout their first year in the classroom?
    - How do these stories inform their intentions for teaching, and in what ways are these intentions limited by their own privilege?
- What are the real internal and external tensions that make teaching for social justice challenging for new teachers?
    - What are the ramifications of these challenges on teachers' abilities to implement social justice pedagogies in their classrooms and lives?

- How do teachers' individual stories tell a larger collective narrative about transformation of self, teaching, and society?

However, throughout conducting this research, I began to see a trend that inspired a transformation of my inquiry. The emerging answers to my initial questions led me to explore teacher well-being—or lack thereof—and how it impacts their teaching. Specifically, I started to explore the following questions:

- How does physical, mental, and emotional well-being impact teachers' abilities to translate their visions for social justice into action?
- What support structures can be put into place to enhance teacher well-being and empower them to overcome challenges?
- What possibilities for change can addressing issues of teacher wellness potentially have on teaching and learning?

Situating this Study within Current Educational Discourses

Understanding the lived experiences of new teachers as they attempt to translate their ideals into practice will help teacher education programs better prepare socially just educators to address inequities within and beyond classroom walls. Although scholars recommend that a vision for social justice needs to be central to teachers' development (e.g., Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2003; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Grant, 2012), limited research has captured how new teachers take up these ideas in practice (Agarwal et al., 2010; Puig & Recchia, 2012). Specifically, there is a lack of longitudinal research focusing on how pre-service teachers interpret and translate their visions for social justice into instruction as they transition out of

teacher education programs and into the world (Zeichner, 2009). This points to the critical need for qualitative researchers to engage with new teachers' narratives "as [sources] of important knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). My study initially set out to accomplish these goals.

However, as we began our storytelling journey together, I also became increasingly drawn to explore the relationship between teacher well-being and teaching for social justice. While a growing body of educational research has revealed the wide range of stresses and struggles new teachers experience during their first few years in the classroom (e.g., Gold, 1996; Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002), there is a lack of research focusing specifically on how teachers' states of well-being impact their ability to overcome internal and external barriers to effective teaching (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2014; Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015). This dissertation study addresses this gap in the literature by examining the effects of teacher well-being (or lack thereof) on teaching and learning across diverse contexts.

Multiple Roles of the Researcher

Teaching as the Practice of Freedom

> To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. 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.
>
> —bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994

Like hooks (1994), my identity as a researcher is deeply intertwined with my identity as a teacher. Over the last decade, I have committed myself to teaching and learning as a practice of freedom as both a pre-k teacher and a teacher educator. As a white, middle class female who taught predominantly Spanish-speaking preschoolers at an under-resourced dual immersion school in San Francisco, I strived to overcome my limitations and take responsibility for my privilege by creating an environment that reflected the experiences, perspectives, and cultures of my students and their families. My passion for creating classroom communities in which all students could thrive strengthened over the last three years as a result of my experiences in the university facilitating spaces for predominantly white, female pre-service teachers to engage in critical dialogue surrounding current issues in education.

In my dual roles as researcher and educator, I integrated pedagogies that challenged the traditional "banking approach to education" (Freire, 1970) by cultivating a democratic classroom community in which all "men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1970, p. 34). I consider it my ethical responsibility as a social justice educator to actively partake in the intellectual and spiritual growth alongside my students (hooks, 1994). Thus, in my classroom, I attempted to ensure that every member of the community—including myself, despite an "official" title of instructor or pre-service teacher—had ongoing opportunities to teach and to learn.

For pre-service teachers in the early childhood and elementary education courses I taught, conversations about issues of social justice extended far beyond the classroom walls. For example, upon conclusion of my first course, a number of pre-service teachers met with me one-on-one to share their thoughts, ideas, and questions regarding their experiences teaching in diverse classroom settings. Additionally, a group of pre-service teachers and I met weekly to engage in critical dialogue about the sociocultural issues we were encountering in our daily lives—an informal gathering that eventually became a community of practice we called "Educate for Equity." In this safe space, these students and I grappled with how to ethically address the everyday injustices we witnessed in their practicum and student teaching classrooms and in the broader community. Following Palmer's (1980) recommendation, we chose "not to release the tension, but to live the contradictions, fully and painfully—aware of the poles between which our lives are stretched" (p. 20). Our intimate conversations sparked an interest in raising consciousness around issues of inequities impacting local early childhood and elementary schools. These discussions led to the design and implementation of social justice workshops for young students in nearby classrooms.

These examples illustrate the ways in which pre-service teachers from my courses translated the social justice theories they learned in teacher education into real world practices. Like Cochran-Smith et al. (2009), I believe that "Teaching for social justice is not just about ideas and beliefs… Rather, it is the enactment of ideas and beliefs in real practice, with real pupils" (p. 363) that matters. Unfortunately, this act of translating principles into practice often gets overlooked in educational research (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). By inquiring into this

neglected territory, I hope to develop new insights that have the potential to improve opportunities and outcomes for students, as well as their teachers.

My Intimate Approach to Research

My interests in "attending to the lives" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 141) of my former students as they transitioned from teacher education into teaching, cannot be separated from the meaningful experiences I had shared with them as their teacher, supervisor, mentor, and friend. From my perspective, the subjective and interpersonal nature of qualitative research—especially, of narrative inquiry—is what makes this style of research so valuable. Unfortunately, what I (and most narrative inquirers) consider to be this approach's greatest strength—its emphasis on "relationships and [the researcher's] coming alongside of participants" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 179)—is often considered its greatest weakness within dominant research paradigms that value objectivity and quantifiable data as sources of "truth."

Seeking to find my voice as an educational researcher who deeply values "the relational" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17) aspect of inquiry within a system that prioritizes measureable data—like standardized tests, teacher evaluations, and scripted curricula—is not easy. But, it is critically important. By traveling into teachers' worlds (Lugones, 1987), I hope to push back against prevailing educational discourses by revealing the perspectives of those who know students best, yet tend to be silenced the most. Zeichner and Liston (2013) remind the educational research community that, "It is time…to recognize, and to take into account, the issues and the knowledge of teachers" (p. 6). I agree that we, as scholars *and* educators, have no more time to waste; we must take into consideration the voices of those who—for better or worse—impact the everyday lives of children across the country and world.

In researching and writing this dissertation, I have experienced a transformation of not only how I view teaching, but also how I understand my relationship to the process of research itself. It has become clear to me that my primary role is not that of the objective researcher, but rather that of someone who conducts and uses research in order to inform and take action that creates tangible change. Throughout this paper, I include the stories of my own growth and evolution that transpired throughout this research study in order to provide a more nuanced and intimate perspective of our collective experiences. Through taking this vulnerable approach, I hope to make accessible the valuable insights this narrative has the potential to offer to the world.

Reflexivity: My Personal Story of Transformation

Finding Wholeness as a Teacher

As a first-year pre-k teacher in a Spanish dual immersion school in San Francisco, I cared so much about providing a meaningful, equitable education for my young Superstars, and their families. Yet, as the to-do-lists compiled, the traumatic moments became more prevalent, and the hours in the day seemed to diminish, I found myself constantly on-edge, anxious, and reverting back to my unhealthy habits of overeating, under-sleeping, constantly working, and at the worst of times, hysterically crying. My roommate, who was also a first-year pre-k teacher experiencing similar struggles, started coming home looking lighter, calmer, and less distressed, and I couldn't help but inquire. "You have to go to yoga," she said, "It's a game changer. And it especially will be for *you,* because you are such a go-go-go person, and this will help you learn to *stop*." I remember thinking, "You have got to be crazy! I don't do yoga!" She laughed, as if she knew that I would eventually come around. And, of course, she was right. After seeing her come home

in a state-of-what seemed like pure bliss after school each day, I could no longer resist the temptation to at least *try*.

After one session of deep breathing and movement, I was hooked. I felt as though the loads of weight that I had been baring on my shoulders over the first few months of school were liberated from my body, and replaced with a newfound feeling of space and ease. I slept better that night, and showed up more present and happy for my young students the next day. One of my Superstars even said to me, "Miss Ilana, you are so happy today. That makes me happy, too!" I was stunned. I could not believe how the simple act of taking care of myself for just a small portion of my evening changed how I experienced teaching, and how my students experienced learning. The immediate benefits left me with no need for convincing—I started going to yoga classes every day at 6:00 am before school, and showed up more ready to be the supportive, present, and loving teacher my students needed me to be.

Within months, my first year of teaching shifted from what felt like an experience of stress, overwhelm, and "fixing," to one of wholeness, growth, and building community. Without even realizing at the time, I started integrating some of the simple breathing and mindful movement techniques I had picked up in my yoga and meditation classes into my classroom. Eventually, I gained the confidence to make up and use some of my own developmentally appropriate wellness practices with my group of emerging bilingual four-year-olds; transformations in teaching and learning happened almost immediately. Starting circle times with five deep belly breaths or alphabet animal stretches made learning time more focused. Silent mindful movement techniques made transitions between activities nearly seamless, and the calming poses we practiced outside on our yoga mats each week made our community stronger.

Families and school staff soon caught on, and asked me to teach them these techniques, too. Soon this became a community-wide wellness effort, inspiring me to continue deepening my understanding of healing practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and other forms of self-care.

A Passionate Teacher Becomes Infuriated

I loved working with my students, and thus, never envisioned myself becoming an educational researcher before graduate school; that is, until I became so fed up with the ways in which research was being conducted in my own classroom that I knew something needed to change. As a teacher, I came to think of "researchers" as outsiders, who had power, but actually only did damage, because they did not know, understand, or experience the lives and perspectives of those whom they were studying. These "outside experts" would come into my pre-k classroom once a year, or, if *they had to*, a few times—depending on whether or not they deemed my four-year-old students "well-behaved and focused enough" to take their standardized "evidence-based" assessments. In my opinion, these assessments were not only developmentally inappropriate, but also should have been conducted by me, the person who *knew* my young students best.

What pushed me over the edge was when my pre-k class was selected to be one of the six early childhood pilot programs in San Francisco to administer the new Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) test, so that the Early Education Department would have enough data to support the implementation of this assessment for all pre-k through first grade classrooms in the district the following year. As a teacher, I remember thinking that this would be a really great opportunity for me to learn more about my students' language and literacy development, and to use this data to help differentiate lessons and improve my practice.

Yet, when the graduate student researchers entered my classroom for the first time, I was shocked to find out that *they* would be administering the test to all my four-year-old students—including my students who had recently moved to the country and spoke solely Spanish—exclusively in English. I was also dismayed by the fact that this test would be conducted by a stranger, who had no relationship with my students, and because of this, did not know who they were, what language they spoke, or what skills they already had developed. Measurements of my students' academic performance were dependent solely on the less-than-ten-minute opportunity they were given to answer a set of narrow, skills-based questions. What ultimately measured their academic "ability"—the score on this assessment—did not take into consideration how the biased context of this assessment influenced each child's ability to perform at their full potential.

In and of itself, this limited approach to assessment infuriated me. But what truly pushed me to speak up was when my students were silenced, and when that silence was misrepresented as incompetence. As anyone who has worked with vulnerable young children would expect, many of my students were either too afraid to leave their safe classroom haven, or too nervous to say their letter sounds or point to the picture as the test required. This was especially apparent among my students who were experiencing trauma or neglect at home and had difficulty trusting new adults—like Marianna, who was administered the PALS test the day after she had been taken away from her mother by the police due to family violence. The "one-size-fits-all" approach to assessment neglected to account for the fact that Marianna's "inability to master phonemic awareness skills" might, just possibly, have been impacted by the trauma of having witnessed her mother being held at gunpoint a few hours prior. In addition, the testing

disregarded the fact that the majority of my students could not even understand the directions, let alone the content of the test, due to language barriers.

Despite these obvious factors impacting students' performance and ability to authentically demonstrate content knowledge, the majority of my linguistically and culturally diverse students, although no less intelligent than their white middle- or upper-class peers, were labeled "low-performing" or "at-risk," perpetuating the growing racial and socioeconomic disparities rampant in our system. I remember when one of my Spanish-speaking students, Javier (who, according to his mom, had never trusted any other adult before preschool), simply refused to go into the back room alone with the researcher. Feeling pressured to protect him against the possibility of being labeled in a way that would set him up to fail in school, I did everything I could to encourage him to take the test—even though it was completely out of integrity with what I knew was best for him, both emotionally and academically. When that did not work, I asked the researcher if *I* could administer the test for Javier, as I knew I was the only adult he had even come close to trusting. "No," she said, "Teachers are not allowed to administer or even *see* the results of test, because that is not objective." My heart dropped; I could feel anger pulsing through every cell in my body. "*Objective!?* He is four-years-old, and I am confident he knows everything on the test…he is just too afraid to take it with you! And what in the world is the point of this assessment if I—the one whose role is to support his growth—cannot use the data to improve my instruction?"

In this disempowering moment, I knew that I would never settle for a standardized education system that sets capable students, like Marianna and Javier, up for failure. I made a commitment to myself never to be silent again in the face of injustice; and when necessary, to

use my privilege as a white, middle class female to work towards building an education system that honors the stories, histories, and cultural backgrounds of all students and the teachers who commit their lives to supporting them. I knew that I could no longer stand quiet when students—especially students living in poverty—are deemed "low performing" before they even have the chance to learn their ABC's or develop a love of learning.

In that moment, I saw that justice required action, that action required community, and that, if I was truly going to fulfill my intention to be the change I wished to see in the world, I must start from the ground up; from my own self out. The last thing I wanted to do in that moment was to leave my kids, my classroom, and my community—but I saw clearly that our current education system was set up in a way that silenced, as opposed to respected, teachers' and students' voices. After seeing so much injustice through my own experiences, I knew I would not be able to live with myself if I did not attempt to break free of this system and do my part. Ironically, the only way I could imagine myself improving classrooms at the institutional level was to leave my own, an unsettling choice I finally made after much consideration.

From Impassioned Teacher to Purposeful Researcher

In my first two years of graduate school I struggled, constantly questioning whether or not I had a place in academia. I could successfully "talk the talk," but I struggled to accept myself for having left the classroom to pursue a degree inside the same academic system that only seemed to perpetuate the problems I had experienced in my teaching. I was continually appalled by the ways in which teachers were (mis)represented, (dis)respected, and (de)-professionalized within larger educational discourses in academia. Some doctoral students and even professors would describe their grand theories for solving issues in education, and talk

about teachers as if they were just numbers with little agency, or even worse, would demonize them. These academics, many of whom had little to no practical experience as classroom teachers from which to ground their ivory-tower solutions, perpetuated my growing frustration with the field of educational research.

I was unwilling to sit back and watch another generation of teachers be blamed for student "failure," be silenced in policy decisions, and be undervalued in educational discourses the way myself and millions of other teachers throughout the United States have been and continue to be every day. I became galvanized to approach my own research in a new way: to engage my students and create a community that enabled teachers—myself included—to bring our insights, knowledge, and expertise to the forefront of academic educational discourses.

I am well aware that, by taking this community-based approach and engaging in deep personal relationships with my participants in this study, my own biases and perspectives become variables that impact my research. Yet, I choose to embrace this intimate approach to research wholeheartedly. For, in my opinion, the true value of qualitative narrative inquiry is its ability to dig deep within the humanity of its subjects (including the researcher), and uncover personal and collective truths that tend to go unnoticed in objectively-driven approaches. In this study, I attempted to foster a safe and courageous space for educators to share *our* stories and be heard without fear of being marginalized. I am well aware that this path to research challenges the status quo and is likely to be met with resistance. However, I know without a doubt it is the path I want to travel.

Sustaining Courage through Self Love

As I became increasingly committed to creating change in my work as a teacher educator and researcher, I knew I would need to cultivate and sustain inner peace in stressful times. I actively studied mind-body wellness practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and took various leadership trainings to embody the work I had found to be so valuable as a teacher.

Towards the end of fall semester in 2013—during the winter before I followed these eight pre-service teachers into their first year in the classroom—I felt an inner calling to deepen my personal practice in yoga. I was in a particularly vulnerable state: I was still grappling with my identity as a scholar and researcher, felt stuck in my personal life, and was experiencing heartbreak for the first time. Yet through it all, I kept coming back to my yoga mat. After yoga class one day, a moment of clarity overcame me. Within seconds, I knew exactly what I needed to do to help me breakthrough my current state of stagnation: sign up for yoga teacher training.

Unlike many people who become yoga instructors, my intention for attending yoga teacher training had nothing to do with teaching yoga in a studio. It was about healing myself, deepening my personal practice, and gaining tools to share with those I care about most, and who I believe have the greatest potential to change the world: our teachers and students. So, without asking permission from anyone (a rarity for me as the person who often seeks validation and opinions from others), I signed up for a 16-day yoga teacher immersion training, which started just two weeks later.

The journey was incredibly transformational for me. In just two and a half weeks, my heart softened, my purpose renewed, and my teaching identity strengthened. Through this physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually expansive experience, I was able to let go of

many of the fears that had been paralyzing me since having moved to Madison to pursue my doctoral degree. The process of surrendering my past negative stories about myself instilled in me a renewed sense of purpose to provide these healing spaces for teachers.

The Turning of My Soul

Rodgers (2006) describes the process of learning to teach for social justice as "the turning of one's soul" (p. 1266). As I reflect back on the moments in my own education where my soul was turned—moments that opened my eyes to the societal injustices that continue to set some students up for success and leave others behind to fail—I am reminded that growing takes courage; I am reminded that long-lasting change does not come easily, and requires deep commitment.

> For change to be lasting, for souls to be turned, teacher-students must have direct experience with compelling contemporary issues, engage in internal and communal reflection, articulate their own needs and plans, and be guided by teacher educators and mentors who are doing the same, all of which will give them insight into themselves, the society in which they live, and institutions in which they work, and ground them in the authority of their own experience and reflection. (Rodgers, 2006; p. 1290)

Only now that I truly understand how necessary it is to turn teachers' souls, and in turn empower them to turn the souls of their students, do I know for certain I made the right choice when I left my classroom that day. Only now that I see how deeply our education system needs to respect and support its teachers, and how committed I am to them, have I become clear on my purpose as a social justice educator *and* researcher. For, as Palmer (2010) reminds us, change cannot be created from within the ivory tower alone, nor can it come only from the bottom-up; it

must come from a united effort. In that spirit, I embrace and acknowledge my dual role as both researcher *and* educator in this study. It is my aim that, in doing so, I can reveal often overlooked insights from teachers that will create more justice for teachers and students everywhere.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation begins by laying out the foundation of this study with a review of the relevant scholarly literature and an explanation of the methodology employed. It then moves into four analysis chapters, which together explore the ways in which participants' identities as new social justice educators evolved throughout their transitions from teacher education into the classroom. It tells the story of how these eight teachers' individual and collective narratives revealed critical new insights into the relationship between teacher well-being and teaching—and how our community of practice drew upon this newfound understanding to transform ourselves, our teaching, and our communities (Souto-Manning, 2013). It culminates by illuminating how the inquiry that began within the confines of this dissertation study evolved into a larger movement (called Breathe For Change) committed to improving the health and well-being of teachers, students, and entire school communities throughout the nation and world.

Chapter Two situates my study within current educational discourses by reviewing the literature that led to the development of my research questions. Specifically, the following chapter begins by reviewing the research on social justice practices within the fields of teacher education and teaching. It then goes on to explore the ways in which well-being is currently being addressed (or not) in educational discourses, uncovering a critical gap in research about the impact of teacher well-being on teaching. Finally, this section explores the notion of well-being,

and investigates the ways in which wellness practices have been shown to impact the social, emotional, physical and mental well-being of individuals both in and outside of the school context.

Chapter Three explains and justifies my methodological approach—a case study informed by teacher research and narrative inquiry—and the methods I used to conduct this study. It provides context for how this dissertation came to be, and places myself and my story in the center of this narrative.

Chapter Four tells our personal histories, exposes the individual and collective visions we had cultivated during teacher education, and describes the challenges that arose during these eight teachers' transition into the classroom. It illuminates the tensions that arose between teachers' "good intentions" and their actual experiences of teaching in diverse educational landscapes around the world.

Chapter Five explores how the tensions these teachers faced correlated with significant decreases in their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and how their stress and diminishing morale impacted their ability to fulfill their intentions for teaching. Through this exploration, the deeply connected nature of teacher well-being and student social-emotional and academic learning became apparent—helping our community of practice to find hope in what often felt like hopeless times.

Chapter Six shares the story of how our community of practice sought and tapped into sources of healing in order to transform ourselves and our teaching despite challenging external circumstances. It describes the process of our collective realization that, in order to become the teachers we intended to become, we needed to take care of our own well-being—and reveals the

story of transformation that took place as we began to integrate mind-body and self-care practices into our classrooms and lives.

Finally, Chapter Seven grounds these eight teachers' narratives within the larger context of the current education system, exposing how their collective journey is a microcosm of the struggles and transformations teachers are experiencing in classrooms across the country. It explains how this dissertation project evolved into a theory of action for how to improve the health and well-being of teachers, students, and school communities—and how this theory of action has inspired the birth of a worldwide movement called Breathe For Change. To conclude, it reveals how Breathe For Change has expanded my research beyond the scope of this dissertation, and is helping to create a more human, effective, and socially just education system for all educators, students, and families.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter builds a foundation for understanding how new teachers' ideas of social justice evolve during transition, and what challenges they face in their attempts to transform these ideals into action in their teaching. In recognizing that these challenges impact teacher well-being, I go on to explore existing literature on teacher well-being (or lack thereof), and examine existing and potential approaches to address the issue of teacher stress and burnout increasingly prevalent in our education system.

To provide context, I first investigate how educational scholars have defined the term "social justice" within the field. Next, I specifically explore how notions of social justice teaching have been taken up in teacher education discourses, and consider the implications this has for social justice-oriented teacher education programs. I then consider the ways in which teacher education programs attempt to promote multicultural awareness and social justice pedagogies, and investigate how these practices impact pre-service teacher learning. Specifically, I highlight how pre-service teachers' dispositions, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching diverse learners transform as a result of their experiences in teacher education.

To understand how teachers take up these beliefs in practice, I first review the scholarly literature related to the experiences of new teachers—what I refer to as "teachers in transition"—in general. I then narrow in on my specific area of interest by exploring the limited research that documents how new teachers negotiate their social justice ideals within socially unjust contexts, and how it impacts their mental, physical, and emotional well-being (e.g., stress levels, burnout). Next, I overview the approaches currently being implemented in education to support teachers in cultivating well-being and mitigating stress. Finally, I provide a brief exploration of emerging programs incorporating wellness practices like mindfulness, yoga, and

other self-care techniques that have been shown to have positive outcomes on teaching and learning. Together, these literature reviews highlight a critical gap in educational research, and lead me to propose a new solution that uses powerful mind-body practices to transform educators' own well-being first in order to transform education. Through exploring the effects of enhanced teacher well-being on teaching and learning, I aim to create a paradigm shift among educators and scholars that will enable them to more effectively prepare, develop, and support socially just educators.

Defining Social Justice

Grant (2012) proposes a robust social justice vision for education, declaring that "social justice is about the cultivation of a flourishing life and not only the narrow preparation for employment" (p. 910). This compelling vision pushes back against the language of "college and career readiness" currently dominating national educational discourses (Conley, 2010). In his acceptance speech in 2008, President Barack Obama declared: "I will not settle for an America where some kids don't have a chance [to attain a high quality education]" (Obama, Inaugural Speech, 2009). However, if we, as a nation, are truly committed to fulfilling on Obama's plan, then perhaps our nation's leaders should take more seriously Grant's (2012) vision for social justice—a vision that honors the "whole" in every child, as opposed to the holes they fill with their #2 pencils on standardized tests. To accomplish such a vision requires that pre-service teachers become critically aware of the educational, political, social, and socioeconomic issues perpetuating disparities within and beyond their own classroom walls.

Broadly speaking, teaching for social justice strives to ensure that all students, despite their differences, have access to learning opportunities that allow them to become active participants in a democratic society (Villegas, 2007). In the majority of educational literature, social justice is framed within a distributive paradigm (North, 2006; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). This paradigm recognizes the unequal distributions of educational outcomes, opportunities, and resources that perpetuate disparities between minority, low-income students and their white, middle class peers (Shakman et al., 2007). From a social justice lens, the purpose of education is to create social change at the individual, classroom, and societal levels (Souto-Manning, 2013). Social justice educators foster this change within the context of the classroom by facilitating spaces that allow all students to develop their full potential as learners and agents of change (e.g., Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Price & Valli, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Educators also recognize and challenge inequities impacting students' potential outcomes at the institutional level (e.g., Adams, 2000; Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Cochran-Smith, 1999, 2004; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner, 2003). In order to unveil the complexities of social justice in educational scholarship, we must recognize the underlying issues that shape how teachers make sense of social justice, and explore how they grapple with the stresses and obstacles that arise as they attempt to put their ideals of social justice into practice.

Many scholars hold definitions of social justice as deeply connected to the notion of oppression, recognizing the role of power and privilege in social identity construction (Harro, 2000; Kumashiro, 2000; Pincus, 2000). According to Freire (1970), schools either serve as sites of liberation or sites of oppression, which exposes the inherently political nature of social justice

in education. Social justice, from Adam's (2000) perspective, concerns issues of "domination and subordination" (p. 2)—such as racism, ethnocentrism, classism, sexism, ageism, and xenophobia—that perpetuate societal inequities. These sociocultural issues cause unavoidable frictions between individuals and groups of people, leading Gerwitz (2006) to suggest that it is unreasonable to believe that educators can pursue practices that are "purely just" (p. 70). However, this *does not* mean that achieving social justice within particular contexts is impossible.

Drawing attention to the multidimensional nature of social justice, Gerwitz (2006) proposes that, "what counts as justice" (p. 70) in education can only be determined within "specific contexts of interpretation and enactment" (p. 69). This implies that conversations about social justice must be grounded in practical, concrete examples, as opposed to abstract conceptualizations (Gerwitz, 2006). Situating conversations about social justice within sociocultural contexts pushes back against the major critique that social justice is undertheorized and vague (McDonald & Zeichner, 2008; North, 2006; Zeichner, 2006). Therefore, understanding social justice as multidimensional provides a framework for educators to envision new possibilities for their students within specific classroom, school, and community contexts.

Teachers that promote social justice use education as a vehicle for social change. Ayers et al., (1998) bring the concept of social justice to life by grounding it in actual practice. They describe how social justice looks and feels in the classroom:

> Teaching for social justice is teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move

> against those obstacles. And so the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is: You can change the world. (Ayers et al., 1998, p. xvii)

In order for teachers to be able to foster these transformational learning spaces, they must first embody the principles of social justice in their everyday lives. Teacher education plays a critical role in preparing pre-service teachers to do just that. In the next section, I address how social justice has been taken up in teacher education, and consider how these discourses shape pre-service teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices.

Discourses of Social Justice in Teacher Education

Over the last decade, a growing number of teacher education programs have explicitly recognized the importance of preparing teachers as activists and agents of social change (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Like many educational scholars, Nieto (2000) draws attention to the critical need for teacher education programs to instill a spirit of social justice in the hearts and minds of prospective teachers. The field of education, she claims, must "take a stand on social justice and diversity, make social justice ubiquitous in teacher education, and promote teaching as a lifelong journey of transformation" (Nieto, 2000, p. 182-3).

This social justice-focused approach to teacher education "involves shifting out of neutral, both in terms of a teacher's orientation to social inequities and of pedagogy" (Kelly & Brandes, 2001, p. 437). Despite political undertones, many programs have included the language of social justice in their mission statements, admission materials, and course titles (North, 2008). Additionally, teacher educators have sought to integrate social justice pedagogies throughout their curriculum (Cochran-Smith, 2009), as well as recruit and retain prospective teachers who

are committed to educational equity (Haberman, 1987; Quartz, 2003; Zeichner, 2003). This progressive movement in teacher education emerged in response to the perpetuating disparities that have undermined the success of children in schools, most notably those from impoverished, marginalized communities.

As teacher education programs continue to take up this social justice agenda, questions have been raised as to whether or not its original intentions are being fulfilled (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Within teacher education discourses, the undertheorized and elusive nature of the term "social justice" has triggered some advocates to critically reevaluate its impact (e.g., North, 2006; Zeichner, 2006). In some instances, the label "social justice" has been applied in problematic ways that limit, or in worse cases, erase possibilities for enacting social change (North, 2008); as a result, critics have argued that social justice is an "ambiguous and ideologically loaded term fraught with potential for abuse" (Villegas, 2007, p. 370). Grant and Agosto (2008) caution that the lack of consensus around a definition for social justice has the potential to result in the concept existing in name only.

To address these inconsistencies, top scholars recently released a compelling set of themed editorials in the *Journal of Teacher Education* in hopes of moving towards a shared vision of social justice (Spalding, 2010). Pushing back against the demand for a precise definition, they deemed "social justice" an umbrella term that includes any pedagogical approach or theory seeking to cultivate teachers who acknowledge, name, and confront inequity (Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell, & Wang, 2010). Examples of pedagogical practices that fall under this umbrella include culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002); culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995); teaching against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991); multicultural

education (Banks, 1993); anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000); and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Cochran-Smith and Power (2010) proposed a framework of social justice that encapsulates these pedagogical practices, which, although distinct in approach, have common goals. The three tenets of their theory—equity of educational opportunities, respect for diverse groups, and teaching through struggle (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010)—take into consideration social justice's multidimensional and situated nature (Gerwitz, 2006). This broad conceptualization of social justice acknowledges the wide range of practices that have the potential to help pre-service teachers learn to teach for social justice.

For the purposes of my project, I choose not to focus on an exact definition of the term "social justice" because I believe it is the ideals underlying the term, as opposed to any "official" definition, that have real impact on teachers' lives. Understanding social justice as a fluid concept—one that can shift and change based on interpretation and situation—will allow me to explore how new teachers integrate the perspectives they developed during teacher education in their struggle to teach for social justice with young children. Agarwal et al. (2010) recommend that teacher education programs "help teachers to see teaching for social justice as a journey, not a finished product" (p. 245). In order to discover how pre-service teachers' experiences in teacher education guide the next phase of their journey into the classroom, I will turn now to a discussion of the types of experiences teacher education programs offer in their quest to develop the next generation of socially just teachers.

Teacher Education Programs

Over the next decade, a projected 2 million educators in the United States will retire and be replaced by mostly beginning teachers (Henning, 2013). The ways in which teacher education programs prepare this next generation of teachers to combat injustices within an unjust educational system has significant implications for how the next generation of students develops. Currently, teacher education programs offer pre-service teachers a wide range of experiences that seek to prepare predominantly white cohorts to effectively educate the growing population of linguistically and culturally diverse students (Sleeter, 2001). In this section, I outline particular components of teacher education programs that aim to raise pre-service teachers' multicultural awareness and improve their pedagogical practices.

Courses

One of the main ways teacher education programs infuse social justice into their curriculum is through courses. Although promoting multicultural understanding is a popular theme across programs, how these ideas are actually implemented in practice varies considerably (Grant, 1994). Some teacher education models consider issues of multiculturalism and diversity peripheral to the core curriculum, and solely address issues of equity in isolated, individual courses (e.g., social justice teaching, multicultural education, culturally relevant teaching, etc.) (Goodwin, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Other programs embrace a more holistic approach by seeking to integrate multicultural perspectives across all courses (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 1997; McAllister & Irvine, 2000). This method holds teacher educators accountable for incorporating social justice principles in all aspects of their curriculum (e.g., methods, content, assessments, etc.)

Unfortunately, studies have found that, in both cases, teacher educators do not always fulfill (or know how to fulfill) their social justice goals, pointing to the critical need for teacher educators to receive training in social justice pedagogies (Chubbuck, 2010; Gollnick, 1992; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Multicultural scholars advocate for a social justice-oriented teacher education model that encompasses specific multicultural courses *and* addresses issues of social justice throughout the entire curriculum (Banks, 1997; McDonald, 2005). This combined approach places value on both the depth and breadth of social justice in teacher education.

Pedagogical Strategies for Teacher Preparation

Teacher educators use a wide-range of pedagogical strategies to develop pre-service teachers' multicultural competencies, which may partially explain the variability in pre-service teacher outcomes across studies (e.g., Davis & Cabello, 1989; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Pedagogies with a social justice orientation typically involve a combination of critical reflection, dialogue, inquiry, and equity pedagogy (e.g., Banks & Banks, 1995; Freire, 1970; Jennings & Smith, 2002; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007). According to Ullicci and Battery (2011), teacher educators should collectively work towards developing what they describe as "color consciousness" (p. 1195); in order to accomplish this, they must help pre-service teachers recognize themselves as situated within and influenced by larger institutional structures.

Some teacher educators draw on specific pedagogical approaches to help pre-service teachers become aware of their own biases (e.g., color blindness and privilege), as well as how these unacknowledged assumptions can impact their future teaching, specifically of diverse learners (Smith, 2005; Zeichner, 2005). Methods used to cultivate self and societal awareness

include writing biographical and autobiographical narratives, conducting interviews, critiquing videos, partaking in field work, defining culture and race, and/or participating in reading clubs and book groups (e.g., Banks, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Sleeter, 2001). Other examples of techniques used to prepare educators to teach for equity include participatory action research projects, cultural autobiographies, class simulations and debates, use of technology, and social critical dialogue (e.g., Davis, 1996; Frykholm, 1997; Lee, 2011; Schrum, Burbank, & Capps, 2007; Chavez-Reyes, 2012).

These interventions create possibilities for pre-service teachers to transform pre-existing assumptions into greater understandings of themselves, their students, and society (Souto-Manning, 2013). However, teacher educators cannot expect transformative results simply by "doing" the method. According to Lee (2011), teacher educators need to understand how pre-service teachers think about teaching diverse learners in order to know how to facilitate opportunities for growth. Learning opportunities that encourage problem posing and critical discourse have been found to be particularly effective at transforming pre-service teachers thoughts and actions (Freire, 1970; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004). Yet, to do this requires that teacher educators also commit to a lifelong journey of personal reflection and growth alongside their students. As Zeichner and Liston (2013) remind us, "facilitating human growth requires that we fuse mind and heart" (p. 48).

Field Experiences

Beyond the classroom, social justice-oriented teacher education programs offer a variety of field experiences that expose prospective teachers to culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse communities (Zeichner, 2010). Many programs provide community-based service

learning experiences to help pre-service teachers gain more authentic understandings of the challenges facing particular marginalized populations (e.g., Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Bollin, 1997; Burant & Kirby, 2002). Community-based field experiences encompass wide ranges of learning opportunities; for instance, some programs require pre-service teachers to attend community events (Farnsworth, 2010), while others recommend that they participate in multicultural tutoring programs in diverse classrooms (Bollin, 1997). In particular cases, pre-service teachers even have opportunities to completely immerse themselves in new cultures by teaching abroad (Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009).

Teacher education programs with a social justice lens typically require their pre-service teachers to do practica or student teach in under-resourced classrooms with diverse students (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1991; Gay & Howard, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Programs commonly aim to foster long-term partnerships with urban schools and districts; these relationships ensure that engagements between all parties (e.g., cooperating teachers, pre-service teachers, students, administrators, etc.) are reciprocally productive and meaningful (Zeichner, 2006). A recent review of the research on student teaching reveals an overemphasis on pre-service teachers' beliefs and attitudes with little focus on how these perceptions actually impact new teachers' practices in the classroom (Anderson & Stillman, 2013). This reflects the general need in educational research for further longitudinal investigations that explore how pre-service teachers integrate what they learned from their teacher education programs—including multicultural education courses, as well as practicum, student teaching, service-learning, and abroad experiences—into their evolving belief systems as they enter the field (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Zeichner, 2009).

While teacher education programs are increasingly making efforts to prepare the next generation of teachers to teach in multicultural settings, what is critical is whether or not these experiences actually result in sustainable changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs and pedagogies. The following section examines pre-service teachers' dispositions, attitudes, and assumptions related to teaching diverse students, and traces how these shift and change throughout their journey in teacher education.

Education of Pre-Service Teachers

According to Ladson-Billings (2006), "The first problem teachers confront is believing that successful teaching for poor students of color is primarily about 'what to do'" (p. 34). In emphasizing the act of "doing," teachers fail to consider how their personal biases impact, and in some cases, determine the decisions they make in their practice. Recognizing the magnitude to which teachers' beliefs ultimately shape their interactions, Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that, "the problem is rooted in *how we think*" (p. 34). Her words suggest that teaching for social justice is not solely about what teachers do with students; it begins with how teachers think about students. Grounded in this epistemological assumption, this section seeks to unpack pre-service teachers' dispositions, or what Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, and Schussler (2010) refer to as "habits of mind." To narrow my focus, I draw particular attention to how pre-service teachers think about teaching diverse learners, and how their perceptions change (or do not change) as a result of their experiences in teacher education. This inquiry will lead to a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers' attitudes, values, moral commitments, and perspectives that relate to issues of social justice (Murrell et al., 2010).

Deficit Perspectives

Pre-service teachers enter teacher education with pre-existing attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching diverse learners as a result of their prior experiences and sociocultural upbringings (Gay, 2010). Studies, including my own, of predominately white, middle class, pre-service teachers reveal that this population of teachers is particularly inclined to hold deficit views about students culturally, racially, and linguistically different from themselves (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1999; Nankin, 2014; Sleeter, 2001). According to Valencia (1997), the deficit thinking model "posits that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies" (p. 2). Educators who embody deficit perspectives fail to recognize their own biases and/or the institutional factors that influence students' poor academic and social-emotional outcomes. This lack of awareness about educators' problematic subjectivities often results in a misplacement of blame onto the students, which perpetuates institutional inequities.

In most cases, this blame is disproportionately misplaced on students from marginalized populations including students of color (Sleeter, 2001), English language learners (Marx, 2000; Nankin, 2014), and/or children experiencing poverty or homelessness (Kim, 2013). In 2012, I conducted a study focusing on how pre-service teachers construct meaning around differences between themselves and diverse students. Specifically, I investigated 22 white, female pre-service teachers during their first semester in the early childhood/ESL cohort in a top-ranked teacher education program (Nankin, 2014). Their reflections on their interactions with diverse learners exposed some of the common deficit assumptions pre-service (and in-service) teachers hold about teaching "other people's" children (Delpit, 1996; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Remarks

included, “They are just lazy!” “If only their parents actually cared,” “I am making up for what they aren’t getting at home,” “Whenever they do not participate, I relate it to being lazy/uninterested,” “They were the ones that had behavior problems” (Nankin, 2014). Interestingly, these deficit perspectives manifested in contradictory ways through the pre-service teachers’ interactions in the classroom. In some cases, they tended to interact less with linguistically and culturally diverse students, due to perceived language and cultural barriers; other pre-service teachers, in contrast, devoted extra attention to students different from themselves with the intention of helping or “saving” them (Nankin, 2014). Long, Volk, Lopez-Robertson, and Haney (2014) warn teacher educators that unless pre-service teachers have opportunities to deconstruct their unexamined biases in teacher education, these uncritical perspectives will continue to persist in their pedagogies.

While some pre-service teachers outwardly express deficit views, others avoid discussions of societal issues altogether (Sleeter et al., 2004). Prospective teachers report feeling afraid, frustrated, and doubtful about teaching students different from themselves (Ford & Quinn, 2010; Nankin, 2014), which may partially explain why many resist discussions about race and ethnicity in general (Hickey & Lanahan, 2012). Gay and Kirkland (2003) discovered that pre-service teachers employ specific avoidance strategies (e.g., silence, diversion, guilt, and benevolent liberalism) to circumvent difficult conversations about social injustices. Similarly, Picower’s (2012) study found that pre-service and in-service teachers use particular kinds of excuses, or “tools of inaction,” to justify why “they [are] falling short” (p. 72) as social justice activists. These excuses fall into four categories, each of which function to inhibit action: substitution (i.e., “I am doing well”); postponement (i.e., “I will do it later”); displacement (i.e.,

"No one else follows through; I can't do it alone"); and dismissal (i.e., "I have a life.") (Picower, 2012). Despite evidence of avoidance, Fehr and Agnello (2012) claim that pre-service teachers are "open to learning, but still somewhat uninformed" (p. 34). Yet, Lazar (2013) found that even those who exhibit openness to multiculturalism still tend to maintain deficit perspectives. Perhaps, this can be explained by the fact that pre-service teachers often consider non-mainstream norms and values problematic (Causey et al., 2000).

Transformed Beliefs

These findings may seem disheartening; however, through reframing pre-existing assumptions—what Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to as "the root of the problem"—pre-service teachers can transform their teaching and change the trajectories of their students' lives. Freire (1921-97) reminds us that, "No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are." His famous words are hopeful. For Freire, becoming a conscious educator is a continuous process; it happens through experience and overtime. Research studies indicate that pre-service teachers *do* have the capacity to transform their limited understandings of students and of teaching (e.g., Rodgers, 2006; Garmon, 2005). As addressed in the previous section, pre-service teachers participate in a wide range of experiences in teacher education (e.g., courses, practicum, student teaching, critical conversations) that allow them to gain theoretical and practical knowledge. Studies have found that these experiences can lead to transformational change in pre-service teachers' attitudes about students different from themselves (e.g., Nankin, 2014). Teacher educators can facilitate this growth by providing pre-service teachers with authentic opportunities to practice critical consciousness (Gay &

Kirkland, 2003), and develop deeper understandings of themselves, their teaching, and society (Souto-Manning, 2013).

Scholars have identified specific experiential and dispositional factors that help to shape pre-service teachers' multicultural awareness and sensitivity (e.g., Garmon, 2005; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010). Based on an in-depth case study, Garmon (2005) discovered that intercultural experiences, support groups, and educational trainings serve to deepen pre-service teachers' understandings of social justice issues. Additionally, he identified three dispositional factors—self-awareness and self-reflectiveness, openness to diversity, and a commitment to diversity—that play a key role in expanding multicultural awareness and critical consciousness (Garmon, 2005). Taking this a step further, Mills and Ballantyne (2010) found that these dispositional stages develop sequentially. According to scholars, pre-service teachers first cultivate self-awareness, then develop openness to diversity, and finally, internalize a commitment to teaching for social justice. The idea that pre-service teachers progress through these stages of growth in a specific order has important implications for how teacher educators think about preparing prospective candidates to teach for social justice.

The stages of learning to teach for social justice, according to some scholars, can—and should—be measured as outcomes for teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Ludlow, Enterline, & Cochran-Smith, 2008). To address this need, Ludlow et al. (2008) developed the "Learning to Teach for Social Justice-Beliefs" (LTSJ-B) scale to track pre-service teacher cohorts' attitudes related to social justice teaching during and after teacher education. The survey measured six aspects of social justice teaching including: "teachers' knowledge, skill, and interpretive frameworks; teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and values; classroom practice and

pedagogy; community participation; teachers' learning in inquiry communities; and promoting pupils' academic, social-emotional, and civic learning" (Ludlow et al., 2008, p. 195). Findings reveal that pre-service teacher beliefs about equity, diversity, and social justice transform over the course of teacher education, and continue to develop during their first year of teaching (Ludlow et al., 2008). Teachers who experience this transformation no longer view diversity or difference as a "deficiency" (Valencia, 1997); instead, they learn to value children's unique assets—or funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992)—as important contributions to the learning process. While this model shows promise in that teacher educators are acknowledging the critical need for more rigorous research in this area, as a field, we have only begun to scratch the surface.

Transition as Transformation

Pre-service teachers are malleable; who they are when they enter teacher education does not necessarily determine who they will be when they graduate, or who they will become when they take on new professional identities as teachers. As studies show, through critical inquiry, pre-service teachers can, and do shift their deficit views about diverse learners into newfound understandings that ultimately transform their teaching (e.g., Picower, 2012). Freire (1970) reminds us that, "apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1970, p. 45-46). The experience of living, inventing, reliving, and reinventing interdependent narratives creates spaces for re-imagining new possibilities for teachers, learners, and society (Clandinin, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2013).

Opportunities for inquiry are especially important for new teachers embarking on pathways into the unknown. This critical period of change represents more than just a transition in and across time, space, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995); it represents a transition in identity, in which past, future, and imagined identities collide to form present identities (Clandinin, 2013). In this liminal space—"the space between what was and what is to be" (Kennedy, 2001, p. 195)—teachers inevitably experience vulnerability and change.

Teachers in Transition

The term "vulnerable" is often used to describe children who are disenfranchised, low-income, or labeled "at risk" (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). This word, however, is seldom associated with new teachers educating this vulnerable population of children. Yet, research shows that beginning teachers—what I refer to as "teachers in transition"—struggle tremendously with the challenges of their new jobs (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). This section explores this unique period of change in teachers' lives, drawing particular attention to how teachers experience the transition from teacher education into teaching. Specifically, I investigate how pre-service teachers carry forward their beliefs about social justice teaching into the classroom. To provide context, I first synthesize the literature on teachers' first year experiences, in general. Next, I narrow in on my focus by examining how new teachers negotiate and enact social justice pedagogies during this vulnerable period of transition in their lives. I conclude this chapter by drawing attention to a critical gap in educational research about teachers in transition who are committed to teaching for social justice.

Stressful Everyday Realities of New Teachers

First year teachers' experiences have been well-documented in relevant educational literature (e.g. Gold, 1996; Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002; McDonald & Elias, 1983; Ryan, 1970; Ryan et al., 1980; Veenman, 1984; Wideen et al., 1998). Although often characterized as idealistic, new teachers acknowledge the daily challenges they experience with students (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; McDonald, 1980; McDonald & Elias, 1983; Rust, 1994). In addition to the typical demands of teaching, new teachers also must deal with acclimating to new professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly 1995), adapting to unfamiliar norms and cultures within this context (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2002), and adjusting to new professional identities (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Taking on a new role involves building relationships with colleagues, students, families, administrators and community members, as well as learning unfamiliar (and, in some cases, scripted) curricula (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). In response to these multiple, and at times, contradictory instructional demands, new teachers report feeling insecure or "lost at sea," not knowing what content to teach or how to teach it (Kauffman et al., 2002). Mandated policies imposed upon schools and teachers add extra pressure, constraining what new teachers can and cannot do in their practices (Veenman, 1984). In many instances, what administrators require teachers to teach conflicts with what new teachers believe is "good and just teaching" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Flores, 2007), placing these teachers in particularly vulnerable positions.

Research on new teachers during this vulnerable period indicates that early teaching experiences impact their self-perceptions, instructional practices, and future career choices. Specifically, studies reveal that teachers' initial years in the classroom affect feelings of success

with students (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), long-term instructional performance (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Rust, 1994), and decisions about whether or not to continue teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Gold, 1996). The unique challenges they experience during this period of transition may explain why attrition rates are highest among new teachers, with about half leaving the profession within their first five years (Ingersoll, 2003; Lambert, 2006). For the majority of teachers, reasons for leaving are due to personal and organizational factors, including burnout, inadequate instructional support, and/or lack of preparedness to teach in multicultural communities (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Lambert, 2006). Notably, those who begin teaching in schools with predominantly low-income, minority, and/or low-performing students are the most likely to leave the profession (DeAngelis & Presley, 2010). In order to transform this discouraging reality, researchers must better understand the issues new teachers face during this time of profound personal and professional change.

Tensions Between Teacher Education and Teaching

A challenging issue teachers in transition confront is the divide between teacher education and actual teaching (Levine, 2006). Whether understood as the disconnect between theory and practice or a consequence of "the university's Ivory Tower mentality" (Borerro, 2009, p. 21), the reality is that recent graduates of social justice-oriented teacher education programs will inevitably encounter tensions when the time comes to implement what they learned during their training into their classrooms (Chubbuck, 2008; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Flores, 2007). Flores (2007) unveils some of the frictions new teachers face when their ideals collide with the expectations, practices, and cultures of urban schools. New teachers trained as "agents of change" (Flores, 2007, p. 395) find that their student-centered perspectives often conflict with

the multiple pressures imposed upon them to teach-to-the-test. Those who believe that learning happens through the co-construction of knowledge within situated contexts, often have difficulty finding common ground with administrators who promote individualization and standardized education (Flores, 2007). Some additionally struggle to negotiate their relationships with teacher colleagues whose traditional practices parallel the "banking approach" to education, a concept Freire (1970) developed to explain top-down pedagogies that indoctrinate students into hierarchical systems and limit their agency (Flores, 2007; Kardos & Johnson, 2007). These examples represent only a small sliver of the wide range of tensions new teachers will unavoidably confront as educators committed to social justice.

Because of these inevitable tensions, equity-oriented teachers are often "left to fend for themselves" (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 221) in their effort to implement social justice practices; consequently, many experience an inner "struggle with hope and hopelessness" (Flores, 2007, p. 7). In this struggle, Sonu (2012) found that new teachers make contradictory instructional choices that fluctuate based on the presence of authority. For example, when being observed by administration, social justice oriented teachers tended to conform to established expectations that promote individualism, competition, and standards-based practices; however, behind closed doors, they often pushed the boundaries by grounding their decisions in subjectively-mediated ideals of social justice and equity (e.g., by developing culturally-relevant curriculum as opposed to using scripted lesson plans) (Sonu, 2012). These acts of resistance, while seemingly insignificant, require incredible strength and courage, and therefore must be voiced within educational discourses. However, spaces for teachers to work through these practices collaboratively are few and far between in our current system.

Engaging in acts of resistance—especially for teachers transitioning into unfamiliar professional landscapes—is not easy, or at times, even possible. According to some new teachers, the daunting realities of urban schools (e.g., the social, political, and/or economic conditions) make translating social justice ideals into action extremely difficult (Chubbuck, 2008). Despite genuine motivations to become activists, disheartened new teachers often find themselves unable to fulfill on the hopes and dreams they initially envisioned for their students. Agarwal et al. (2010) found that "Once pre-service teachers leave their university programs and enter their own classrooms, their commitments sometimes collide with the realities of being novice teachers in a harrowing and unforgiving school system" (p. 239). However, these challenging realities do not make social justice teaching an impossible feat, nor do they suggest that teachers should stop trying to transform the system from inside out. Rather, these barriers are what make addressing issues of injustice in all classrooms—especially those with the youngest and most malleable students (Souto-Manning, 2013)—so important. To engage in this work, teachers must first take responsibility for their roles as "agents of change" (Flores, 2007, p. 395); by accounting for their own agency, teachers can better recognize the extent to which they choose to conform or comply with practices that contradict their beliefs. It is when teachers take actions that align with their authentic beliefs that teaching for social justice becomes possible.

A Disconnect Between Intention and Action

When asked, "Do you *believe* in teaching for social justice?" new teachers are likely to respond with a clear and simple, "Yes." However, when the question becomes "*How* do you teach for social justice?" responses necessarily become far more complex, wide-ranging, and personal. This distinction exposes a common trend in educational research on new teachers.

Most studies focus on teachers' beliefs and attitudes, as opposed to their actual pedagogies, offering little insight into what social justice teaching actually looks and feels like in practice (Puig & Recchia, 2012). Although limited studies have specifically explored new teachers' experiences of "doing" social justice teaching (Whipp, 2013), examples from the literature on social justice education suggest that addressing issues of social justice in classrooms with young children is not just possible, it is critically important (e.g., Banks, 1993; Bentley, 2012; Gutstein, 2003; Kelly & Brandes, 2012; Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2013). While studies of "good and just teaching" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) offer invaluable pedagogical insights, they seldom take into consideration the ways in which teachers' past experiences in teacher education helped to shape their equity-oriented practices (Zeichner, 2009). This illuminates a critical gap in educational research: the divide between research on teacher education (the intentions) and research on teaching (the action).

Despite the fact that a growing number of teacher education programs claim to prepare teachers to teach for social justice (Lazar, 2013; McDonald, 2007), how program graduates actually act according to social justice principles during their initial years of teaching remains under-investigated (Agarwal et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2009). To explore this area, a few researchers recently followed graduates from the same social justice-oriented cohorts into their first year teaching (Agarwal et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Whipp, 2013). Using semi-structured interviews and observations, scholars sought to understand how new teachers integrate ideas related to social justice teaching in practice. Overall, Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) discovered that most first-year teachers uphold critical viewpoints, incorporate their students' cultures into the curriculum, and aspire to connect with

every student; yet, first-year teachers infrequently displayed an understanding of how to address the larger systemic inequities impacting their students. Agarwal et al. (2010) found that graduates exhibit resiliency in their effort to translate what they learned into practice, which helps them to persevere through times of struggle. While these few studies exposed how a number of new social justice educators negotiated teaching for equity, they paid little attention to how their practices connected to what they learned in teacher education. Seeking to bridge this gap, Whipp (2013) interviewed social justice-oriented program graduates after their first year of teaching to gain insight into their perceptions about how their experiences before, during, and after teacher education informed their social justice pedagogies.

Together, these inquiries call attention to the need for further research that seeks to understand how teachers in transition negotiate social justice teaching practices. While the limited research in this area does not capture the full story, it does provide a great foundation for further research. In order to better prepare pre-service teachers to learn to teach for social justice, teacher educators must first understand how program graduates actually enact what they learned about social justice in their everyday teaching lives (Agarwal et al., 2010; Borrero, 2009; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Puig & Recchia, 2012; Whipp, 2013). This new direction in educational research has the potential to open up meaningful possibilities for supporting teachers in transition.

Why Teachers' Best Intentions Are Often Left Unfulfilled

According to Michie (2007), teachers' best intentions do not always facilitate positive change in the classroom, especially when their intentions are conceived from a place of privilege without a full understanding of the cultural and social complexities of diverse student

populations. Yet, teachers who come from a privileged background—mostly white, middle class females (Gomez, 1994)—are usually the last to recognize this gap between intention and action. Schieble (2012) attributes this lack of awareness to the fact that engaging in critical conversations about whiteness and privilege are often easier to avoid than to confront, especially for those who have never before experienced oppression.

While social justice-oriented teacher education programs intentionally create opportunities to help pre-service teachers cultivate self-awareness, self-reflectiveness, openness, and a commitment to diversity (Garmon, 2006), these types of opportunities for reflection and consciousness-raising are often lacking, or under-prioritized, for teachers in the school setting. With so much emphasis on standardized testing, teacher evaluations, and the Common Core, administrators are pressured to spend both time and resources ensuring that teachers meet district expectations (Flores, 2007). As a result, opportunities for critical reflection, dialogue, inquiry, and equity-focused conversations among teachers (e.g., Banks & Banks, 1995; Freire, 1970; Jennings & Smith, 2002; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007) are often the first to be cut from the school's priority list, despite the fact that these practices have been associated with improvements in student academic performance (Zeichner, 2009).

Teacher Networks and Communities of Practice

To address the lack of support for teachers to cultivate community, some infrastructures such as teacher networks and communities of practice have emerged. Most research on social justice teacher networks focuses on experienced teachers (Ritchie, 2012); however, findings suggest that these networks—which can be understood through Lave and Wenger's (1998) conceptualization of "communities of practice"—have the potential to create positive change for

teachers transitioning from teacher education into the profession. Although wide ranging, equity-oriented teacher networks universally aim to help critical educators fulfill on their visions for social justice and push back on mainstream neoliberal discourses of standardization, accountability, and failure (which are often concealed by discourses of "achievement"). Support structures for teachers range from small, informal inquiry groups to national teacher networks (Picower, 2007, 2011; Ritchie, 2012). Specifically, social justice educators participate in various types of teacher research groups, study groups, activist groups, special interest groups, and teacher mentorship programs, as well as national teaching organizations and other professional development networks (e.g., Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007; Ritchie, 2012). Across the board, findings reveal that networks provide enriching opportunities for social justice educators to build community and improve their pedagogy (Ritchie, 2012).

Although research on new teachers' experiences in social justice networks is scant, the few studies in this area reveal that novice teachers benefit from participating in communities of practice with like-minded peers navigating similar struggles (Borrero, 2009; Fecho, 2000; Picower, 2007, 2011; Puig & Recchia, 2012). For instance, Picower (2007, 2011) facilitated a social justice critical inquiry project group (CIP) to help pre-service teachers fulfill on their visions to teach for social justice during their transition into teaching. Through engaging in weekly meetings, CIP participants learned to infuse critical pedagogies into mandated curriculum, develop critically conscious learners, and even publicly speak out against neoliberal policies that negatively impacted their students (Picower, 2007, 2011). A study of a university-sponsored mentorship program for recent early childhood teacher education graduates yielded similar positive results; with the support of teacher mentors and other first-year teachers,

new social justice educators learned to navigate the system to provide quality special education support, implement student-centered curricula, and build close relationships with diverse families (Puig & Recchia, 2012). Members of this local community of educators valued the "safe space where they could access nonjudgmental understanding and support from peers who were not only experiencing similar challenges in the field but were approaching them from a shared foundation" (Puig & Recchia, 2012, p. 274).

While these specific cases show that communities of practice can play a pivotal role in helping "new teachers begin their careers with vision and a sense of community" (Borrero, 2009, p. 222), the majority of well-intentioned new teachers lack this type of communal support and often "find themselves unwittingly reproducing existing social inequities" (Picower, 2007, p. 1). Moreover, existing studies related to support networks for new teachers do not take into consideration those teachers who graduate and then relocate to new professional landscapes across the country and world. Like the small fraction of fortunate new teachers who are granted opportunities beyond graduation to continue growing alongside their fellow cohort members, traveling teachers in transition—who journey across time, space, and place (Clandinin, 2013)—not only deserve this privilege. They *need* this privilege.

The Critical Gap: A Failure to Empower Teacher Well-Being

While most new teachers enter the profession passionate and committed to teaching for the long haul, the struggles and stresses they face often cause them to burnout and leave the classroom (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This has huge negative implications for our education system, not only on the passion and efficacy of teachers, but also on the system's

financial sustainability. Teacher turnover costs districts in the United States an average of $2.2 billion per year—money that is taken away from other important investments such as hiring the best teachers or providing students with access to technology (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). This reactive approach is akin to our healthcare system's failure to enact preventive care (Futures & American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008); in failing to support the teachers we have, we are forced to pay a higher cost for lower quality to replace them.

Teacher education program enrollment rates are decreasing (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014), teacher recruitment efforts are floundering (Zeichner, 2003), and teacher retention rates are declining at astonishing rates, with approximately 50% of teachers leaving within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2003; Lambert, 2006). This high attrition rate for teachers across the board is alarming on its own; however, it is perhaps even more alarming that first year teacher attrition has risen more than 40% over the past two decades, showing how this problem is only getting worse (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). As may be expected, these numbers are even more tragic in high-poverty communities; 20% of all teachers leave these schools every year (Phillips, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), educational and social-emotional outcomes of children in low-income schools are negatively impacted the most by these issues (as cited in Phillips, 2015). Yet, little research has been conducted to explore how teachers' social-emotional, mental, and physical well-being (or lack thereof) might be contributing to these increasingly alarming statistics.

Through exploring the literature on how educators are trained to address issues of inequity, how they put this training into action, and what challenges hold them back, it becomes clear that a major gap exists in our knowledge. There is a lack of research on the impact of

programs and structures that aim to attract, retain, and empower teachers (Zeichner, 2003). More specifically, there is a dearth of infrastructure and literature on teachers' physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and how it relates both to their effectiveness in the classroom, and to their likelihood of staying in the profession (Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015).

This lack of focus on teacher well-being is indicative of the education system's overall disregard of teacher agency (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Although it has been well known for years that teachers "experience a great deal of stress that may result in depressed mood, exhaustion, poor performance, or attitude and personality changes, which, in turn, may lead to illness and premature retirement" (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008, p. 155), few efforts have been made to transform these negative experiences impacting teachers into opportunities to find inner strength and grow (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). It is essential that new teachers—especially those in transition—are given tools, techniques, and support to cultivate and sustain their own well-being within challenging external circumstances. The critical gap in our understanding of how to improve teacher morale and enhance teacher well-being makes it challenging to effectively address the major issues of recruitment, retention, and burnout currently facing our education system.

What is Well-Being?

As I became more interested in the relationship between teacher well-being and these systemic issues of burnout and attrition, I began to explore the literature related to the topic of well-being to gain a deeper understanding of its defining characteristics and determinants (e.g., Davidson, 2004; World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). A wide range of research on the topic of well-being has been conducted by academics including doctors, neuroscientists,

philosophers, etc., as well as health and wellness practitioners and spiritual mystics (e.g., Davidson, Begley, & Amari, 2012; Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015; Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010;). Through synthesizing some common threads across all these disciplines, I constructed a foundational conceptualization of well-being to use as a framework through which I approached the next stage of my research.

Scientific experts, including senior scientist Deepak Chopra, measured people's well-being across 105 countries and concluded that "total well-being" consists of the following five interrelated subcategories: career well-being, financial well-being, social well-being, community well-being, and physical well-being (Chopra, 2015). According to the National Wellness Institute, wellness—which can be applied across the five subcategories of well-being listed above—is defined as "a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential" (Definition of Wellness section, para. 2). This definition builds upon the prevailing definition of health: "being sound in body, mind, or spirit; especially: freedom from physical disease or pain" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). While this definition of health places greater emphasis on the physical, the general topic of well-being encompasses far more than just issues relating to the physical body; it also includes the realm of mental health. The World Health Organization defines mental health "as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (WHO, 2014, para. 1). Although emotional and mental health are sometimes viewed as separate from physical health, one's mental and emotional states of being are inextricably related to one's physical body, and vise versa.

According to the 2015 World Happiness Report, well-being is a more relevant and meaningful construct to study than happiness in relation to systemic issues; research has found that emotions such as happiness and sadness are often transitory, whereas a person's well-being tends to be more stable over time (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2015). "For instance, a person can experience sadness as a response to a tragic situation and respond in a context-appropriate way with sadness, but still have high levels of well-being. Similarly, someone can experience moments of happiness, yet still have low levels of well-being" (Davidson, 2015, para. 8). Thus, for the purposes of understanding the emotional impact of teachers' experiences on their pedagogies, relationships, and self-concepts, I chose to focus on teachers' overall well-being as opposed to specific emotional states.

Particularly relevant to my work was the discovery that well-being can be cultivated as a skill. According to Davidson (2015), there are four key components of well-being that are often overlooked that can be leveraged to help individuals enhance their "total well-being." One of these four components is sustaining positive emotion; research in this realm found that people who "carry the enjoyment of an activity with friends or family with [them] into the following hours" (Davidson, 2015, Sustaining Positive Emotion section, para. 1) reported higher levels of well-being and displayed lower levels of the stress hormone, cortisol. The second method for enhancing well-being is to gain the skills to rebound from negative emotions with resiliency—which has been shown to decrease neuroticism and increase reported well-being (Davidson, 2015). Third, research has revealed that people who spend their time mindfully (i.e., focused on what they are doing in the moment, instead of being distracted by unrelated thoughts about other times, things, or places) report higher levels of well-being. Finally, "prosocial

behaviors such as empathy, compassion and gratitude" (Davidson, 2015, Caring for Others section, para. 1) have been shown to be an effective strategy to enhance well-being.

Through exploring the literature on both teacher education and teaching, and on well-being, it became apparent that there is a lack of research at their intersection; schools, districts, and current educational discourses have and continue to place little emphasis on preparing teachers with the skills to enhance their overall well-being (Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015).

Effective Wellness Strategies in Other Settings and Industries

Although there are a lack of strategies and infrastructures in place to support teacher well-being, general research on the benefits of wellness practices such as yoga and mindfulness is abundant, and has shown significant reductions in stress and improvements in well-being and resiliency both in and outside of work environments (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010; Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2011).

Other sectors, such as business, have been increasingly adopting programs to support employee well-being, recognizing the value of employee satisfaction and its impact on retention and performance (Dalal, Baysinger, Brummel, & LeBreton, 2012; Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015). These programs have found significant positive correlations with improved job performance, employee loyalty, retention, happiness, and reductions in stress (Grecucci, Pappaianni, Siugzdaite, Theuninck, & Job, 2014). It's ironic that our education system is so far behind in supporting the well-being of its employees, considering the fact that national teacher surveys have concluded that the profession has been associated with extremely high levels of stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Fortunately, education can draw on the growing body of

research on practices that enhance individual and community wellness to shift the paradigm and empower teachers to find well-being despite the stresses of their work (e.g., Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 2013)

A large body of research connects the practice of mindfulness and meditation to psychological and physical well-being, illuminating its ability to reduce stress, enhance focus, and improve emotional regulation (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Glomb et al., 2011). Davidson (2004) defines mindfulness as "moment to moment non-judgemental attention and awareness," and for decades has conducted groundbreaking research concluding that mindfulness and meditation can help create new neuronal pathways that help cultivate inner peace, and improve overall health, happiness, and well-being (e.g., Davidson, 2004; Davidson, Begley & Amari, 2012; Davidson & Irwin, 1999). Additional studies on the effects of mindfulness have revealed a positive association with life satisfaction, vitality and interpersonal relationship quality, and a negative association with stress, depression, and anxiety (symptoms commonly associated with the teaching profession) (Brown et al., 2007; Glomb et al., 2011). In terms of job performance, research has found that wellness practices, such as mindfulness and meditation, lead to enhancements in cognitive flexibility and alertness (Moore & Malinowski, 2009; Zeidan, Johnson, Diamond, David, & Goolkasian, 2010) and serve as a preventative mechanism against distractions and mistakes under pressure (Herndon, 2008).

The practice of yoga has also been shown to provide benefits to physical, mental, and emotional health (Ross & Thomas, 2010). Specifically, it's been shown to increase strength and flexibility, enhance mental and emotional resiliency, lower blood pressure, and boost immune function (Cowen & Adams, 2005). In the words of B.K.S. Iyengar, a renowned yoga teacher,

"yoga allows you to find an inner peace that is not ruffled and riled by the endless stresses and struggles of life" (Archer, 2005, p. xiv). Having support to cultivate the "inner peace" Iyengar refers to would be invaluable to teachers facing the stresses and challenges outlined in the review above.

When considered in light of the critical gap in research on the topic of teacher well-being, the findings of the benefits of wellness practices like mindfulness, meditation and yoga, in other settings suggest that integrating them into schools could span this gap and enhance teacher performance, increase retention, and improve social-emotional well-being for teachers and students alike.

Integrating Wellness Programs into our Education System

Some programs have begun to utilize wellness practices as mechanisms to alleviate stress within the education system. However, most of these types of interventions are currently targeted at classroom settings, specifically focusing on delivery to students rather than training teachers to foster these benefits both for themselves and their students long term (Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015; Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012). Research on the effects of the application of wellness practices like mindfulness, meditation, and yoga on teachers remains underdeveloped and largely absent from the literature to date.

Research on the benefits of wellness practices and other social-emotional strategies in the classroom has shown significant increases in student academic performance (Berger & Stein, 2009; Black & Fernando, 2014; Butzer, Ebert, Telles, & Khalsa, 2014). For example, findings from a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, which involved 270,034 kindergarten through high school-age students, showed that

students who participated achieved an average of an 11 percentile point gain in academic performance (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). While schools and districts are increasingly valuing and prioritizing social-emotional learning for students (Greenberg et al., 2003), little emphasis has been placed on providing teachers with training and tools to enhance *their own* social-emotional development and well-being. Most yoga and mindfulness interventions in schools, for instance, bring in outside consultants to administer the programs to students, without regard for the teachers' involvement (or lack thereof) (Stueck & Gloeckner, 2005; Serwacki & Cook-Cottone, 2012). This approach can be prohibitively expensive over time, and does not equip teachers to integrate these wellness practices into their own lives, nor support them in embodying well-being in their teaching. By not actively developing teachers' own social-emotional skills, we limit their capacity to authentically facilitate social and emotional learning for students, and also overlook a key opportunity to address the endemic problems of teacher stress described above.

Alternatively, the approach of training teachers themselves in wellness practices such as yoga or mindfulness would allow educators to mitigate stress in their own lives, as well as address systemic issues of recruitment, retention, and burnout. Additionally, focusing on training teachers would enable them to facilitate these practices in their own classrooms, providing their benefits to students with more financial sustainability (Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell, & Metz, 2013). A limited number of efforts have emerged within the last decade that do specifically utilize this approach by targeting the teacher (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Roeser et al., 2013). One example is Mindful Schools, which trains educators to "integrate mindfulness into their lives and their work with youth" (Mindful Schools, 2015).

These programs have received a warm reception among some educators and schools, but, for the most part, have yet to be adopted on a broad scale by administrations (Roeser et al., 2013).

As elucidated above, wellness programs in other industries have shown an improvement in job performance, retention, and satisfaction (Dalal et al., 2012; Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015). At the same time, teacher networks and communities of practice have been shown to have positive impact on teachers' resiliency and ability to effectively educate for social justice (Ritchie, 2012). It has also been well documented that strong social and community connections improve well-being (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Together, these findings suggest that an effort focused specifically on forming a community to enhance the well-being of teachers could prove effective. My study aims to address this critical gap in infrastructure and research by exploring this issue of teacher well-being within the context of a community of practice focused on social justice.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe and justify the methodology I used to explore how new teachers draw on and evolve their understandings of social justice in their practice, and how their well-being impacts their ability to do so. I begin by situating my research study within the context of a social justice-oriented teacher education program, and locate myself as the researcher within the study. I then briefly introduce my eight participants, and describe how our collective experiences during their two years in teacher education inspired this yearlong inquiry. I then frame my methodology within a qualitative paradigm, and explain why I chose a case study approach informed by teacher research and narrative inquiry as my methodology. Finally, I outline the methods I employed within this framework, describe my approach to analysis, and justify why my methodology, methods, and conceptual framework together helped answer my research questions.

Context of Research Study: The Development and Recruitment Process

When the first two cohorts of pre-service teachers I taught in the teacher education program graduated in May of 2014, I, like them, was experiencing a period of great uncertainty and anticipation. I knew that, in order to complete my Ph.D., I needed to conduct a research study, analyze the results, and write a dissertation. Most educational research studies I had read up to this point—specifically in the realm of teacher education and teaching—had clear-cut methodologies, distinct beginnings, middles and ends, and seemingly strict boundaries between the researcher and participants. As a researcher who identified first and foremost as a teacher, and whose teaching practice had always been deeply rooted in relationship and community building, I knew that I would have to approach research in a new way if I were to going stay true

to myself and make the impact I aspired to make. I knew that the only way I could conduct research with integrity would be to merge my dual roles as teacher and researcher. So, that is what I chose to do.

When my students graduated, I knew I was not done learning and growing with them, and they, too, made it clear to me that they were not done learning and growing with me; we had just barely scratched the surface. During this time of great change in all of our lives, I felt particularly inspired to cultivate the space for us to continue to support and hold each other accountable for our individual and collective intentions as social justice educators. *This* is what lit me up; and then it clicked. As soon as I realized that I did not have to separate my passion for community building and teaching for social justice from my scholarly work, I knew that *this* is what I wanted to do for my dissertation.

Rather than coming up with an entire research protocol before I recruited potential participants (like most academics do), I instead chose to invite them to participate in the creative process alongside me. I knew I did not have all the answers, but that together, we could co-create an experience that had the potential to support the individual and collective visions and needs of everyone involved. To begin this research development process, I first shared with them my evolving ideas about cultivating a community of practice via email and invited them to contribute their ideas as well.

The following enthusiastic email was sent on August 7, 2014 to five of my equity-oriented former teacher education students who had all recently landed their first teaching positions in schools around the world.

The First Email (as written colloquially)

Hi inspirational (almost!) teachers,

I'm reaching out because I'm thinking about how I want to change the world, and I keep coming back to you all. So tell me what you think about this...I've been considering what to do for my dissertation, and this is what I am now thinking...

I am currently taking a 10-month-long transformational leadership training that is absolutely changing my life, and I want to take the structure and content of it and change it specifically for developing teachers. I am thinking that we can create ongoing support structures so that we can stay in community, exchange ideas, and have a network of supportive, loving colleagues. I would follow you all in some way into your classrooms, set up monthly calls since we will be all over the world, and link you all together to ensure that you are fulfilling your own mission, goals, and dreams about your teaching and lives. This structure would serve to help you stay true to your teaching philosophies while you are attempting not to drown in the challenges of being a new teacher. It will not ADD any additional stress - the intent would be to actually take that stress away by finding new ways to address challenges through working together and supporting one another.

Tell me your thoughts… if you are all into this, I will commit, dive in, and make it happen. This is kind of my dream… to create communities of practice that transform the lives of all participants, and to create spaces for you to blossom as new teachers. I'd be honored to be your mentor, partner, and support along the way… and I'd be excited to keep our relationships and passions alive in the midst of all the challenges that may arise. We can do it from afar… and I also see this as the beginning of something bigger… because who knows what this can turn into…

This is simply an idea, but if you feel like it would expand your world to participate in something powerful, with like-minded friends and teachers, let me know… I have been thinking about creating something like this for so long now because of the inspiration you all have provided me in my teaching. So, I figure, why not do it for my dissertation? PLUS, WE WOULD END UP WRITING A BOOK about the experience, to showcase the importance and possibilities of developing socially-conscious teachers of young children… and I want nothing more than to reflect your powerful voices, stories, and inspirational lessons to the world.

Thoughts? Please respond to the group so I can see where you are at… you would NOT need to help with the planning or anything, although I look forward to learning from you during the year to see what type of program you think would help you become a better teacher… that way I can continue to develop the program based on your needs.

So much love, Ilana

Participant Responses and Commitment

As the tone of my email suggests, the possibility of facilitating this sacred space for these new teachers overwhelmed me with purpose and inspiration. Little did I know when I drafted this informal email that these five teachers would be just as enthusiastic as I was to develop and participate in this collaborative support structure throughout this unique period of transition in all of our lives. The first teacher responded to the chain immediately:

> I am so. Very. In. This sounds wonderful, and it could be a very meaningful experience for all of us. I would love the opportunity to collaborate with you (and with all of you!), and to further develop my sense of self and sense of social justice for early learners. :). (Potential participant, Email Correspondence, August 2014)

Andrea brought her voice to the conversation just a few minutes later: "I love this! I think it could be incredible!" Then the next teacher came in with a clear, "Yes!!!" Cynhia, too, was in. And a few days later, after Lauren received Internet access for the first time since moving to Honduras, she replied to all:

> This all sounds absolutely wonderful, Ilana. As always, I want to help in whatever way possible…Right now, the idea of moving all of you here to Honduras to work at my Bilingual School sounds like a wonderful plan. (muahahahha!) (Lauren, Email Correspondence, August 2014)

Their enthusiastic responses made me realize that this link—that would connect these passionate aspiring social justice educators in the midst of great change—could also benefit some of my other former students, who, like the five I first emailed, deeply cared about addressing issues of inequity in education. Within days, I had forwarded the same email on to

five more recently hired teachers—Christa, Marissa, Mia, Elizabeth, and Linh—who, like the others, saw this project as an opportunity to personally and professionally grow, and as a means to document these transformations over time. In her response, Christa said:

> I am hopeful that this experience will help me stay more on task in order to document this once and a lifetime experience and to learn and grow from it. And maybe help another first year teacher down the line. (Christa, Reflection, August 2014)

While all ten of the soon-to-be teachers I had recruited felt similarly to Christa, and *wanted* to participate, two who I had sent the first email to were unable to make the long-term commitment due to personal and professional reasons. Thus, nine of us remained: eight transitioning teachers, and me.

Within less than a week of the original email being sent, this group of nine individuals had come together as one community. The eight teachers, in addition to having taken my courses during teacher education, met at least one of the following criteria: they had been supervised by me for at least one semester of practicum teaching; they had actively participated in a community of practice we co-constructed called Educate for Equity, or; they had shown a particular interest in learning to teach for social justice during teacher education (e.g., met with me one-on-one to continue reflecting after my course ended, volunteered in community projects addressing issues of injustice, etc.).

Participant Inclusion in Development

After the initial email exchanges, I conversed with each participant to learn more about what they felt they hoped to get out of participating in our community of practice, and what ideas they had or structures they wanted to be put into place in order to get the most out of the

experience. I then incorporated their individual and collective ideas and feedback into a research protocol and set up follow-up discussions with each participant. During these conversations, I shared my personal and professional goals for conducting the yearlong inquiry, described what their involvement would entail, and then created the space for them to share their intentions.

Specifically, I hoped to: (a) document the individual and collective stories of first-year teachers as they attempted to teach for social justice; (b) create opportunities for beginning teachers to reflect on and improve their practice; (c) provide a safe space for new teachers to share their vulnerable narratives and receive ongoing support from a close mentor/teacher educator (me); (d) cultivate a community of practice through facilitating ongoing opportunities for new teachers to exchange stories and hold one another accountable to their goals as social justice educators, and through the process; (e) discover and implement creative approaches and strategies to improve their teaching. Those who chose to commit to participating agreed to partake in all five aspects of the study. However, because I intended to involve participants in the co-construction of this project as it developed over time, I let them know that I would be happy to shift the project plan based on their emerging needs and feedback.

Teacher Participants

Teacher Education Experience

The eight new teachers in my study all graduated from a social justice oriented teacher education program at a large Midwestern University in the spring of 2014. Specifically, six participants were part of the inaugural Early Childhood/English as a Second Language (EC/ESL) teacher education cohort and had taken my early childhood education methods course during

their first semester in the program in the Fall of 2012 (which also happened to be my first semester in graduate school). The other two participants were part of the transitioning-out Early Childhood/Middle Childhood (EC/MC) cohort, and in the spring of 2013 had enrolled in my introductory early childhood education course. These two pre-service teachers came to know a few of the other six participants through their involvement in the social justice-oriented community of practice we had co-constructed in Spring of 2013 (called Educate for Equity as referred to above).

The two-year EC/ESL program consisted of four semesters of coursework, including three semesters of practicum teaching, one semester of student teaching, and other professional development trainings; the EC/MC program was comprised of similar components, but required one additional semester of coursework. Despite these differences, both groups of pre-service teachers participated in courses, practicum, student teaching, community events, and other field experiences. They engaged in critical discourses surrounding social justice in education, which often continued outside formal teacher education spaces. Through these experiences, many pre-service teachers, including those who volunteered to participate in my study, developed close relationships with me and with each other that are still growing to this day.

Educational and Cultural Background

The eight educators who chose to embrace this opportunity got hired during the summer of 2014 to teach in diverse pre-k through fifth grade classrooms throughout the country and world during the 2014-2015 school year. Although these teachers all graduated from the same social justice-oriented teacher education program, and in most cases, had comparable upbringings, each teacher had a unique story (which will be told in detail in Chapter Four).

Lauren—a white, middle class female who grew up in a single parent household and attended predominantly white, public schools in Madison, Wisconsin—left the country for the first time to pursue a first grade English teaching position in an exclusively Spanish-speaking school in Copan, Honduras. Two other teachers—Andrea and Cynhia (the two participants from the EC/MC cohort)—moved across the country together to Oakland, California to teach kindergarten and fifth grade at the same urban charter school, serving predominantly Latino and African American low-income students. Andrea is white and grew up with a single mother in a socioeconomically diverse community in Wisconsin; Cynhia, in contrast, is Taiwanese-American, and grew up with two parents in a town with mostly white, middle class families and high-performing public schools. Elizabeth, who came from an almost exclusively white middle- to upper-class, suburban community in Milwaukee—yet attended diverse public K-12 schools that bussed in students from the inner city—moved to St. Paul, Minnesota to teach pre-k at a HeadStart school serving almost entirely African American children. Marissa, also white, returned home to the Chicago area to teach first grade; yet, unlike the high-performing private school she had attended as a student, she chose to teach in an urban school serving predominantly low-income, Spanish-speaking students. Linh—a Vietnamese-American pre-k teacher—returned home to Milwaukee to teach 4-year-old children at a HeadStart school. Unfortunately, she was laid off a month after school began due to budget cuts, and was immediately transferred to another under-resourced preschool across town. Christa, a white teacher who grew up in a suburb in Wisconsin, received her first-grade teaching position in the same metropolitan district where she had student taught, which happened to be close to the public schools she attended as a child. Lastly, Mia, who is biracial (African American and

white), returned back home to a diverse suburb of Chicago to teach third grade at the same public elementary school she attended as a child.

The racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds of these eight teachers closely parallel the demographics of the predominantly white, female, middle class teaching force in the United States (Banks, 2006). The eight participants teach culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse students who "*live* in different worlds" (Gay, 2010, p. 144) than the worlds they had come to recognize as "normal" as a result of their upbringings and schooling experiences. These beginning teachers acknowledged that they would never fully understand the experiential realities of their diverse students, or the oppression many of them experience on a daily basis (Gay, 2010); yet, despite cultural barriers, their increasing awareness of social injustices continued to motivate them to push back against the inequities impacting their students. This study explores how these new teachers "revised and reshaped the story of [their] lives" (Capps & Ochs, 1995, p. 15) as their ideals of social justice from teacher education came into tension with the everyday realities of teaching diverse young children in communities throughout the world.

Reasons for Participation

The transitioning teachers chose to participate in this specific community of practice for a variety of reasons, including personal growth, instructional improvement, community support, peer connections, and critical reflection. Lauren's response to my question, "What are your intentions for participating in this ongoing reflective, growth opportunity and community of practice?" (see Appendix A for guiding reflection questions) powerfully captures why these teachers decided to commit to this long-term inquiry:

> I thoroughly believe that through self-reflection, teachers (and anyone) can better their individual practice (or any activity in their lives) as well as share their growth/realizations with fellow colleagues to help them grow. Through this particular experience, documenting and reflecting upon my first year of teaching (with the help of Ilana), I hope to more easily see my growth, my transformation. I hope to see my strengths, particularly ones, which I have not yet noticed. I hope to see my faults and weaknesses and actively work towards altering them. I hope to see my triumphs and my struggles, my starting and my ending, my ups and my downs. In times of weakness, I hope that open communication on top of self-reflection will lift me up and push me further. In times of great pride, I hope that this experience will always bring me back to reality, pushing me to a new potential, never allowing me to be completely satisfied. The idea of not wanting to ever be completely satisfied with a practice at first sounds crazy, or greedy, or something. But I don't think teaching is like reaching enlightenment; I don't think there's ever an end. I think there is always more and more that we can do, which makes our jobs so challenging, but makes opportunities like this super important and valuable as well. (Lauren, Reflection, August, 2014)

As Lauren's reflection and the teachers' initial reactions to my email suggest, all eight participants felt compelled to embark on this reflective journey with like-minded peers (and me) during what they imagined would be a challenging transition; by staying connected "over time, and in a…series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), these teachers saw this as an opportunity to hold themselves and each other accountable to living out their pedagogical ideals in action, despite barriers.

Through their experiences in teacher education, these eight participants developed deeper understandings of who they were and who they hoped to become as social justice educators. Yet, as they transitioned into unfamiliar spaces, their worldviews would inevitably come into conflict with particular facets of these new teaching environments (e.g., administration, mandated curriculum, policies, colleagues, students, families, etc.), placing them in particularly uncomfortable positions (Flores, 2007). For this reason, this group of new teachers—like all teachers in transition—would need spaces outside their formal work settings to intimately share and reframe their stories. This year-long inquiry was purposely designed to provide a safe space for these vulnerable teachers to give and receive support so that they could be the "good and just teachers" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) they originally envisioned becoming when they courageously chose to take this path.

Methodology

To understand how these eight teachers in transition negotiated and enacted ideals of social justice as they traveled from teacher education into their own classrooms (and how their ability to do so was impacted by their well-being), I draw on Grbich's (2007) definitions of methodology and methods to distinguish between my research approach and the specific tools and processes I used to conduct my inquiry. My methodology—a case study informed by teacher research and narrative inquiry—involves specific guidelines based on particular principles; my methods—reflections, semi-structured interviews, community calls (which I consider a type of focus group), and in particular cases, the sharing of photos, videos, and images—are the techniques I employed in data collection (Grbich, 2007). I started collecting and iteratively

analyzing my data in August 2014, and continued to do so throughout the rest of 2014 and 2015. I conducted the final round of one-on-one interviews with participants after their first year of school came to an end, and continued to individually and collectively engage in critical reflection even after the original scope of the year-long research project had come to completion.

In the following section, I define teacher research, and justify why this type of qualitative research approach is particularly appropriate for my case study. Next, I define the parameters of my case and address the affordances and constraints of using narrative inquiry as a methodological approach. I then describe the methods I use throughout the data collection process, and discuss how I analyzed the data based on the content I collected from participants. Finally, I justify why these particular methodological choices have the potential to contribute important insights to the field of teacher education.

Teacher Research

As a former pre-k teacher and teacher educator, I often found myself frustrated when external researchers would enter my classroom, administer a (typically standardized or quantitative) assessment, and then publish claims about my teaching and my students that I felt misrepresented who I was as an educator, who my students were as learners, and most importantly, what my students were capable of. This oversimplification of the complex nature of teaching and learning inspired me to bring teachers' voices to the forefront of educational research. By prioritizing the stories and experiences of teachers grappling with the everyday realities of teaching, teacher research challenges the traditional power dynamics of scholarship by opening up new spaces for critical inquiry.

In collaboration with these eight social justice-oriented first year teachers, I used teacher research as a tool to help me rethink my own practice and question my own assumptions as a teacher educator and emerging scholar. Through reflecting on my own role as a teacher educator, I intended to challenge the status quo not only in the context of early childhood and elementary education, but also in the field of teacher education. I believed that working at the intersection of the two presumably contradictory worlds of teaching and research—what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011) refer to as "working the dialectic" (p. 19)—would afford educational scholars, like me, as well as scholarly educators, like my participants, opportunities to critically inquire into the daily challenges of practice while simultaneously contributing to the theoretical knowledge base in education research. As an emerging scholar who has spent most of my professional life in the classroom, this self-reflective, inquiry-based approach to research allowed me to draw on my authentic teaching experiences as the foundation for this scholarly project, as well as improve my practice as a teacher educator in the process.

Teacher research, also known as practitioner research or practitioner inquiry, assumes that teachers are experts of the teaching profession (Goswami & Stillman, 1987). This non-traditional methodological approach acknowledges that teachers are uniquely positioned to offer critical knowledge, perspectives, and insights about teaching and learning that are inaccessible to educational researchers working outside the classroom (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2011). Devoted educators *and* researchers Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009, 2011), developed this methodology out of their deep concern for the increasing inequities in education as well as the manner in which educators were inadequately represented in scholarly discourses related to teacher education, teaching, and professional development. They argued that inquiry, knowledge,

and practice are not oppositional, but have a "reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationship" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2011, p. 19), which, if embraced, can open up spaces for deeper understandings of the complex realities of teaching and teacher education. Like Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011), I also believe that "it is not only possible, but also beneficial to simultaneously take on the role of both practitioner and researcher" (p. 19). By facilitating a community of practice that pushes teachers in transition to embrace and reflect on these dual roles, I aimed to help teachers fulfill their collective goal of creating more socially just opportunities for their diverse pre-k through fifth grade students.

As a researcher and facilitator, the teacher research approach enabled me to draw on my teaching experiences—with young children as well as with pre-service and in-service teachers—as relevant sources of knowledge that informed the questions I asked, how I chose to engage in inquiry, and why these explorations mattered for teachers, students and society. For the eight participants, I used teacher research as a tool to encourage critical reflection, which pushed them to confront the daily predicaments of teaching in the context of their own classrooms as well as the larger educational system. Creating opportunities for my participants to explore the tensions between their theoretical understandings and pedagogical practices opened up critical spaces for them to engage in an ongoing process of self-inquiry. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011) refer to this type of deep inquiry as a "stance," or "a critical habit of mind, a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice that carries across professional careers and educational settings" (p. 20).

Taking into consideration the fluid and incalculable nature of reflection, I conceptualize inquiry as a "stance"—or worldview—to open up new possibilities currently inaccessible within

traditional time- and place-bounded classroom research projects, which utilize pre-determined sets of methods to generate knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011). This expanded orientation towards inquiry pushes back against current educational discourses by shifting social and political influence in the field of education to teachers—who, according to this counter-hegemonic perspective, have the greatest potential to transform the education system from the inside out (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011). Through creating dynamic, ever-changing structures for teachers to explore their authentic experiences of teaching over time and across communities, I hoped to bring these critical, yet often silenced, voices to the forefront of education research.

Inquiry as stance is grounded in three specific philosophical values, which together serve as the foundation of my work with the eight teachers who I taught, supervised and mentored throughout their two-year teacher education program (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011). In terms of values, inquiry as stance is more than just research; as I often reminded my participants, it is a *theory of action* that calls upon teachers to deconstruct and transform the perpetuating inequities that negatively impact their students' education and lives. This action-oriented approach gives *agency* to teachers by repositioning them at the forefront of conversations relevant to political, economic, and social issues in education reform. Underlying this conceptualization of inquiry is the assumption that teachers are experts of their own practice, and that their intellectual understandings should help guide the direction of education transformation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011). This paradigm shift in research on teacher education and teaching—from objective to experiential—can create new possibilities for teachers to contribute their critical voices to discourses currently shaping local and global educational landscapes.

Using these values—theory of action, agency, and education transformation—as the foundation for my work with teachers, I also draw on Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2011) four dimensions of inquiry as stance to help my participants engage in deep processes of self-inquiry as they transition into the teaching field. The interconnected dimensions of inquiry—knowledge, practice, communities, and democratic purposes—recognize the value in basing studies of teaching in the practical experiences and critical perspectives of teachers, as opposed to the evaluations and observations of external researchers. This blurring of boundaries between the role of teacher and the role of researcher empowered both my participants and me to draw on our personal and shared educational experiences as sources of deep knowledge. Based in our everyday interactions with children, families, and communities—as well as with each other—these individual and collective teaching narratives have the potential to contribute new insights to the educational research base, and ultimately to build a more socially just world for students, teachers, and society.

Narrative Inquiry

I use narrative inquiry as a methodological approach to understand and honor new teachers' authentic human experiences throughout their first year of teaching. Clandinin and Connelley (2000) define this non-traditional, qualitative approach to research as "a way of understanding experience."

> It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and

> telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social (p. 20).

Entering into this narrative inquiry after having taught and gotten to know my participants since the beginning of their experience in teacher education uniquely positioned me as a researcher, because I was not only aware of, but had also contributed to, who they had become and how they aspired to grow as new teachers. My experience living alongside these young women for the duration of these three years enhanced my ability as a narrative inquirer to recognize incremental changes that would likely go unnoticed by an objective observer—allowing me to more accurately recommend new areas for growth and transformation. Beginning this exploration in the midst of my already close and trusting relationships with these teachers enabled me to more deeply explore how their individual and collective identities developed and strengthened over a time far beyond the parameters of a typical year-long research study.

I draw on Clandinin and Connelley's (2000) relational definition of narrative inquiry as a lens through which to explore the complex interactions that occurred within our community of practice. By living alongside teachers as they engaged in self-study, I intended to explore the relationships between each participant and their emerging identity, each participant and me, each participant and the other participants, each participant and their students, and each participant and their communities. Through exploring their narratives and interactions, I hoped to illuminate how the stories participants told, and the relationships that developed within the context of our co-constructed community of practice, influenced their individual and collective identities, perspectives, pedagogies and senses of purpose. By facilitating a safe space and building

structures for these new teachers to reflect on their accomplishments, challenges, and transformations throughout their first year in the classroom, I recognized that, like these teachers, I too would be embarking on my own journey of self-study and personal growth.

Within the context of our collective inquiry, I drew on Cole and Knowles (2005) conceptualization of self-study—or "qualitative research focused inward" (p. 257)—as a tool to help guide my participants in becoming researchers of their own practice. According to this perspective, self-study is "personal, subjective, practically-oriented, qualitative in nature, and often creatively communicated in narrative form" (Cole & Knowles, 2005, p. 256). Teachers who engage in this powerful practice use typical qualitative research tools including observation, interview, and artifact collection as a means to reflect on and improve their teaching (Cole & Knowles, 2005). My participants used these methods of documentation as a means to give and receive critical feedback, generate new ideas, and build community with other educators. Through documenting their teaching experiences with the support of other social justice educators, these teachers sought to deepen their understandings of self and create more socially just, peaceful environments for their students, families and communities.

Case Study Informed by Narrative Inquiry

Case studies involve the examination of experience. This qualitative approach offers insights into specific phenomena within particular contexts, which Smith (1979) refers to as "bounded systems" (as cited in Stake, 1995). These integrated systems consist of multiple interactive parts that often come into tension with one another (Stake, 1995). Specifically, case studies seek to uncover complexities and tensions, rather than reduce meaning into generalizable categories (Stake, 2006). Conducting case studies enables researchers to illuminate nuanced,

often nonlinear, interrelationships within specified milieus. At the beginning of any case study, researchers must define the bounded system—what is and is not being studied—by articulating the study's area of focus as well as its parameters (Stake, 1995). Because case studies attend to the qualitative nature of human experience, the focus and parameters will inevitably shift and change throughout a study. Yet, creating boundaries for a given case allows researchers to collect and analyze rich, descriptive, and complex forms of data; through this iterative process, researchers develop intricate understandings of individuals and groups within their natural environments.

A case study can involve one or multiple cases (Stake, 2006). In educational research, single case studies typically investigate the idiosyncrasies and specificities of individuals, groups, or programs (Stake, 1995). Collective case studies, on the other hand, draw on multiple cases to illustrate how a particular issue—like teacher well-being, for instance—plays out in unique contexts (Stake, 2006; Cresswell, 1998). In a collective case study, the case (e.g., issue) is considered singular, but draws on subsections from multiple cases for representational purposes (Stake, 2006). Given my interest in weaving together new teachers' individual *and* collective stories as they transitioned from teacher education into their own classrooms, I recognized that either approach—a single case study (emphasis on the group) or a collective case study (emphasis on multiple individuals)—could reveal important insights. Conducting collective case studies would have afforded me the opportunity to attend to what Van Maanen (1998) refers to as the "critical uniqueness" of each teacher's experiences in specific contexts (e.g., grade levels, cities, communities, etc.) as compared to others; however, this approach would disregard the

critical role of collective storytelling in participants' individual identity formation that a single case study would make possible.

Therefore, in this study, I conceptualized the case as a community (a single case), as opposed to eight individuals (multiple cases), to account for the interrelatedness between individual identities and collective identities. I defined my study as a single case that explored how eight first-year teachers—graduates of the same teacher education program and members of our co-constructed community of practice focused on social justice pedagogy—negotiated their ideals in practice with young children throughout the world.

This dynamic approach would reveal how individual narratives shape and reshape collective narratives, and in turn, how collective narratives shape and reshape individual narratives over time and through space (Clandinin, 2006). Weaving together new teachers' individual and shared stories would portray both "the common and the unusual" (Stake, 2006, p. 90) aspects of their teaching experiences. Through telling and retelling their personal stories, participants would develop clearer understandings of who they were and who they hoped to become. As these teachers became more self-aware, they would gain tools to radically change who they would become. Capps and Ochs' (1995) depiction of narrative highlights the powerful potential of storytelling for these vulnerable teachers in transition:

> Along life's space we *become* the stories we tell about our lives. Through narrative we struggle to bridge our past, present, future, and even imagined lives to formulate coherent identities. We travel along this narrative bridge in multidimensional time: we portray past, future, or imagined identities in present-time storytelling interactions with other people. Through this storytelling process, we reshape these identities in keeping with who

> we feel or hope ourselves and others to be at the moment. In this way, our present identities evolve out of complex temporally, linguistically, and interactionally organized communicative encounters. (Capps & Ochs, 1995, p. 14)

Their words, like Okri's (1997), suggest that if new teachers reframe their past stories, they too, can change their lives. This cyclical process of storytelling—that weaves together past, present, and imagined future identities—is the foundation of narrative inquiry.

My narrative inquiry investigated how a group of committed first-year teachers reframed their personal narratives over time and across educational landscapes, and how their individual narratives eventually transformed into a collective story. Specifically, I explored how their identities, pedagogies, and community contributions transformed as they journeyed into diverse classrooms alongside others traveling down similar paths. As we engaged in storytelling processes with one another, I began to weave the themes that emerged within each teacher's story into a larger story. I drew on the disjointed stories they each told about the tensions and stresses they were feeling (and, in many cases, the lack of support they were receiving), and then intentionally chose specific stories from my data that highlighted the themes that spanned their experiences. Through this inquiry, I was able tell how these teachers' well-being impacted themselves, their teaching, and their worlds as they attempted to fulfill their intentions as social justice educators.

I drew on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) research framework, the three dimensional inquiry space, as well as the terms they use within this metaphorical space, as a means to understand how teachers in transition interact (*personal* and *social*) over a year-long period of time (*past, present* and *future*) in landscapes throughout the world (*place*) (p. 50). I also used

their notion of "directions"—inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 49)—to examine the complex experiences that emerged within this case's bounded system. Specifically, I used these directional terms as tools to explore new teachers' internal conditions (*inward*) and external environments (*outward*), as they moved through time (*backwards* and *forwards*) and across diverse educational landscapes (*situated within place*) as one community (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

This community of practice for teachers in transition—the case—was like a bridge; it supported and linked equity-oriented educators together across time, space, and professional landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). This bridge provided these eight young women what Clandinin (2013) refers to as a liminal space, or "the space between what was and what is to be. It creates both the time and space to play with possibilities not yet imagined" (p. 128). The co-created reflective experience opened up possibilities for these transitioning teachers to compose and recompose the beginning chapters of their individual and collective stories of becoming socially just educators. By engaging in this narrative inquiry, these teachers would transform their pedagogy and their lives; yet, the transformation would not end with just these eight teachers. Through sharing their collective stories with others, they would also transform the world.

Acknowledging the Value and Limitations of Teacher-Focused Narrative

> It is time for the educational research community to recognize, and to take into account, the issues and the knowledge of teachers and others who work in schools. (Zeichner & Liston, 2013, p. 6)

While I consider myself a critical scholar, the lens through which I approached analysis was not grounded in deconstructing these teachers' language usage or critiquing their views about teaching and social justice; my intention, rather, was to address the critical problem Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) identified by actually giving these eight teachers the space to be heard within a political and education system driven by policies that directly affect, but too often do not take into consideration their voice (Apple, 2013). My purpose as a teacher researcher doing narrative inquiry was to reveal the messy, real, and emotional perspectives of teachers because, as Zeichner and Liston (2013) remind us, "The move away from demonizing or glorifying the teacher to renditions that capture teachers along more realistic, insightful, and vulnerable dimensions allows greater depth of understanding" (p. 80).

As a critical scholar, I recognize that it is essential for me to take responsibility for the limitations of my intimate approach to teacher research by openly acknowledging both participant and researcher positionality. First and foremost, I would like to be clear that this dissertation centers on teachers, not students, families or administrations. While I recognize that the students and families that teachers serve are at the heart of the work, my interest in focusing solely on new teachers' experiences of teaching is to tell a story often untold (Whipp, 2013). Most of the stories I draw on include "I" language, which, if the primary focus were a discourse analysis, would likely serve as a major source of critique (Rogers, 2011)—especially since the focus on self is, in and of itself, a privilege. Within the scope of this project, however, the use of first person narrative was crucial for realizing the goal of bringing teacher voices to the forefront of educational scholarship (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Additionally, we cannot ignore the privilege that each of these teachers—and myself—brought to our conversations. While the questions I asked throughout the reflective process intentionally pushed them to acknowledge privilege both individually and collectively, it is important to note that these teachers and I have cultural, socioeconomic and educational privileges that the majority of their students do not. As their stories in Chapter Four will reveal, all of the teachers entered their new education spaces with preconceived notions of what education was and should be like, based on their limited experiences in schools with more resources and support, and less diversity and disparity. Although the questions I posed (see Appendix A) intended for them to confront their own and each other's biases and expand their perspectives, there still remained a risk of perpetuating the "savior complex" that is common among teachers whose backgrounds differ from those of their culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). It is imperative that we, as educators, are aware of our limited perspectives, because this cultural gap between teachers and students is only widening, with about 82% of all teachers being white teaching about 50% non-white students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Methods and Data Collection

I developed a year-long research plan intended to help teachers in transition deepen their understandings of themselves, their teaching, and society (Souto-Manning, 2013). The research design involved multiple strategies that, together, aimed to engage participants in transformational processes of personal and collaborative reflection and unveil the complexities of their unique teaching experiences.

Data specifically included teacher reflections, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, group community conference phone calls, teaching artifacts, and in certain cases, pictures, videos and images. Providing a variety of unique opportunities for these eight teachers to reflect and connect helped me to capture their complex teaching stories from different angles and through multiple lenses. Upon completion of this relational inquiry, I weaved together their evolving, yet, initially disjointed individual and collective narratives into one coherent, powerful story (which will be illuminated in the chapters to follow). By piecing together isolated parts of a complex puzzle, my intention was to give teachers the chance to look back and see the bigger picture. This would provide teachers, like Marissa—who once told me, "Everyday, I have moments where I feel like the worst teacher in the world," (Marissa, Reflection, November 2014)—the opportunity to look back at their stories in a new light and realize, "Maybe there is hope for first year teachers after all" (Marissa, Reflection, November 2014).

Teacher Reflections and Narratives

Individual reflections served as the primary source of data in this study. Before the school year began, I articulated to my participants that my purpose in having them reflect and share their evolving stories on a consistent basis (at least once a month) and over an extended period of time (before, during, and after the school year) was for them to document their experiences and growth at multiple stages throughout their first year teaching. To capture how their perspectives, identities, and practices would transform over time, I collected their first reflections (in the form of written narratives) during the summer between teacher education and teaching; for this specific reflection, I asked participants to describe their experience of transition between teacher education and teaching, and to document how they were feeling knowing that their first year of

teaching was just around the corner (e.g., fears, excitements, hopes, doubts, etc.). I also invited them to share their visions for themselves, their students, and their communities, as well as declare their intentions for participating in this community of practice with their peers and me.

Throughout the entire 2014-2015 school year, participants sent me their written narratives in response to guiding questions I posed to the group via email each month (see Appendix A). Participants had the choice to use these reflective prompts in whatever way they felt would best support their individual, introspective processes. Because of this (intentional) openness, how and to what extent teachers used these guiding questions varied; for example, some responded directly to all questions, others drew on some questions to guide their thinking, and at times, a few chose not to use them at all. To evoke creativity, and to ensure that I accounted for all styles of self-expression, I encouraged participants to reflect in whatever form they felt (in the moment) would enable them to fully express their authentic perspectives. Approximately half of the teachers sent me written reflections on a monthly basis (as I requested), which typically came in the form of journal entries, personal letters to me or to themselves, or direct responses to my guiding questions. Yet, to my surprise, the other participants took this personal growth opportunity to the next level, embracing it with more enthusiasm than I could have possibly imagined. All participants sent me at least one reflection per month; however, several became so inspired by the process of introspection that they began to send me multiple reflections each month, which came in various forms of creative expression.

For instance, in October, Elizabeth created a video comprised of photos, images, quotes, and written reflections, juxtaposing her childhood and teaching experiences. This visual representation captured the growing tensions she was facing as the only white person in an

almost exclusively African American classroom. A few weeks after I received this artistic compilation, she decided to use Skype to record herself speaking about her experiences (as if we were in the same room), beginning what soon became an ongoing "face-to-face" virtual dialogue between the two of us.

During the same period of time, yet on the opposite side of the world, Lauren continued to return back to her Google Doc (shared with me) *on a daily basis* to reflect through writing poetry, stories, journal entries, and even letters to imagined strangers. In this sacred space, she consistently grappled with what it meant to teach for social justice in a third world country, sharing her deepest concerns, proudest accomplishments, and greatest fears. In one of her daily journal entries, Lauren touched on the impact of this reflective process:

> The very act of creating written reflections on this Google Drive is something that I am, and we all should be, proud of. Coming home from school and wondering, "Did I handle that behavior correctly?" or "What can I change to make this work for him?" or "Well, *that* activity went right over their heads. What can I do to better prepare them for tomorrow?" all make me a better teacher. Every day, I reflect before, during and after my practice. I reflect in solitude, with my fellow colleagues, with my administrators, with you and with our team of first-year teachers. I reflect all. the. damn. time. It is because of this that I am more aware of student needs, as well as my own. It is because of this that I am more flexible in my practice. It is because of this that I am confident in standing up for myself and my pedagogy. (Lauren, Reflection, November 2014)

Like Lauren and Elizabeth, all eight teachers found value in their reflective processes, and invented creative ways to document their growth. In collecting their stories in the present

time—during which things often seemed hopeless—my goal was to eventually provide these teachers the opportunity to look back at their experiences and recognize not only how far they had come, but also that, while they may not have been able to feel it in the moment, hope was actually there all along. Although I had no idea what their next reflections would bring, I was always sure of one thing: their stories would change me. Through this reciprocal transformation, I uncovered my own answer to Elizabeth's question: "So what is my place here?" (Elizabeth, Reflection, October 2014)

Teaching Artifacts

In addition to written and verbal reflections, participants were encouraged to collect and send me teaching artifacts. These tools intended to help teachers' improve their pedagogy, address students' individual needs, and enhance their reflective process. Teaching artifacts ranged from lesson plans to student work to photos of the classroom environment; those that involved other human subjects were de-identified to maintain confidentiality. Participants sent pictures of these artifacts to me as part of their reflections, or used them as additional sources of professional development.

Community Calls

To provide a space for teachers to exchange personal stories and collaborate with each other, I facilitated monthly conference calls, which we collectively named "community calls." This "safe place for stories to exist and be told" (Clandinin, 2013, p.18) allowed the nine of us to enter into each other's emotional worlds, despite being separated in the physical world. Following Henning's (2013) recommendation, I used this unique space as an opportunity to "provide post-graduation collaborative support and research it" (p. 121). The community calls,

which began in September 2014, took place on the final Sunday evening of each month (7:30 p.m. CST), and lasted for one to two hours, depending on various factors (e.g., the specific topics/issues we discussed, extenuating circumstances that arose, participants' level of exhaustion during the call, etc.). Participants joined the call each month by dialing into a conference line that I set up solely for the purpose of this study; to ensure that our conversations remained private, only those who agreed to participate in the study were given access to the conference call number and code. Each community call was audio-recorded for transcription and analysis; to mitigate risk of a breach of confidentiality, the recordings were destroyed immediately after transcription was complete.

The community calls had an intentional, yet flexible, structure that encouraged all participants to tell and retell stories, share opinions, discuss confronting issues, exchange ideas, and connect within a democratic space (see Appendix B for community call facilitator agendas). As the facilitator, I began each call with a personal check-in (e.g., each person shared their "highs and lows"), and then asked a few guiding questions to elicit their stories, emotions, thoughts, and opinions relevant to the themes that surfaced in their written reflections that month. I purposefully asked broad guiding questions so that teachers could take the conversation in a relevant direction, based on their individual and collective needs at the time. Because I believed it would be difficult for these teachers to recognize their successes in contexts of struggle, I intentionally facilitated opportunities for them to share about and be acknowledged for their accomplishments and proudest moments (what was working), in addition to discussing their challenges (what was not working). At the end of each call, I created time for teachers to receive targeted support from the group, as well as identify their intentions for the following month.

After the call, I typed up and emailed these intentions to the group so that they could hold themselves and each other accountable to fulfilling on their goals as social justice educators until we met again. As the facilitator, I constantly reminded myself that if "the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed" (Freire, 1970, p. 54), recognizing that there would always be room for us to individually and collectively grow through sharing and reflecting upon our stories. To hold myself to the co-creative nature of this inquiry, I sought feedback from participants after each community call so that our next experience could be a source of inspiration, strength, and community for everyone involved.

Interviews

I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with each participant at the middle and at the end of the school year as an additional source of data (see Appendix C & D for interview schedules). These interviews took place either in-person or over the phone, depending on proximity of the researcher/participant, and were all audio (and in some cases, video) recorded for transcription and analysis. At the time of the first round of interviews, I had already become deeply immersed in dialogue with each participant through our reflective exchanges and community calls. The timing of these interviews was intentional, as it allowed each participant to enter our conversation in the midst of their evolving narrative, and to move in whatever direction made the most sense based on their individual contexts (see Appendix E for first interview protocol).

These interviews helped me better understand participants' past, present and imagined future identities and experiences related to teaching diverse learners, and how these identities and experiences were shaped by their upbringings, schooling experiences, and teacher education.

Additionally, these conversations allowed me to explore the ways in which teachers told and retold stories of their experiences at different points in time, as well as gave me opportunities to further inquire into aspects of their earlier reflections that I construed as significant, but did not yet fully understand. In the final interviews, which took place after the end of the school year, I created the space for each teacher to relive and reframe their past experiences in a dialogic intimate forum. Through these interviews, I gained newfound insights that enhanced my ability, as the listener, to recognize the ways these teachers shifted their perspectives about themselves and their teaching over time—and weave together their evolving individual stories into one coherent narrative (see Appendix F for second interview protocol).

Ethical Responsibility and Institutional Review Board

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me that part of our collective responsibility as narrative inquirers is to acknowledge our place in our participants' parades. Within any inquiry, we must recognize that:

> We have helped make the world in which we find ourselves. We are not merely objective inquirers, people on the high road, who study a world lesser in quality that our moral temperament would have it, people who study a world we did not help create. On the contrary, we are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61)

I am aware that the complex roles that I played in these teachers' lives raise particular ethical concerns in regards to conducting research; however, through involving participants in

the co-construction of all aspects of our reflective journey, the boundaries between us—the researcher and the researched—eventually blurred together to create one story. It is through this blurring of boundaries that this inquiry became *our* story, not just mine. For, as Capps and Ochs (1995) remind us, "Like the music that flows when instruments are played, the stories that emerge when words are spoken are collaboratively constructed" (p. 117).

When we, as narrative inquirers *and* educators, make the conscious decision to "intentionally put our lives alongside others'" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23), particularly those we have taught, we simultaneously make an ethical commitment to honoring what Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) refers to as the fidelity, or the sanctity, of our tellers' meanings of their own stories. As a researcher who cared deeply about my participants, I believed it was not only my obligation, but also my duty, to preserve their original interpretations, as well as honor the "betweenness" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995), or intersubjective bonds, between my participants (the tellers) and myself (the receiver). I sought to maintain fidelity by upholding the meanings my participants had explicitly expressed through their reflections as well as those they were unable to articulate through words. By making ethical decisions that honored the voices and choices of participants at each stage of the research project—from design and methodology to data collection and analysis to representation—I hoped to not only preserve the sacredness of their narratives, but also to develop partnerships that would last a lifetime.

Part of fulfilling my ethical commitments as a researcher of human subjects required that both my participants and I adhere to the guidelines, procedures, and parameters, which had been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The original IRB application included detailed descriptions of the research design and methods mentioned above, except for use of

images, photos, or videos (of the participants). Yet, because some particularly creative teachers started to send me reflections with images, photos, and videos (of themselves), which I believed would greatly contribute to the research study and the broader educational community, I requested a change in my IRB application. This change, which was approved, required that those who would like to use images, photos, or videos and/or be identified (in name) sign a re-consent form agreeing to these modifications. All of my participants signed this consent, and I included their photos, videos, and names in my analysis.

Data Analysis

Multicultural Education as Transformative Education

During the data analysis and writing processes, I drew on Souto-Manning's (2013) theory of "multicultural education as transformative education" (p. 11) to explore three interrelated levels of transformation: transformation of self, transformation of teaching, and transformation of society. This theoretical framework provided a foundation for understanding how transformations of teachers themselves related to transformations in their teaching, and collectively, how those both impacted and were affected by the transforming educational landscape in society as a whole. Using these three lenses, I examined the individual and collective narrative experiences of teachers before, during, and after their first year in the classroom. This method of examination provided insights into how these social justice teachers' ideals, classroom teaching practices, and identities within society as a whole transformed in relation to one another. Finally, observing teachers from these three lenses offered a foundation

from which to see the effects of teacher well-being (or lack thereof) on self, teaching, and societal transformations.

Transformation of Self. I drew on the first layer—transformation of self—to explore the evolution of teachers' individual social justice identities and ideas as they transitioned into the classroom. I studied teachers' emotions, self-perceptions, and stories over time to reveal their own intimate personal experiences during this challenging transition. Through this lens, I analyzed the ways in which their own privilege influenced their narrative stories, and revealed trends and similarities among these teachers' experiences to highlight larger systemic issues. By focusing on teachers' deeply personal transformations, I was able to explore the effects of their own personal well-being on their self transformation, and relate their own transformations to the other layers of Souto-Manning's (2013) theory; the transformations in their teaching and in society.

Transformation of Teaching. Alongside an analysis of their self transformations, I simultaneously explored the ways in which these eight new teachers attempted to implement socially just pedagogical approaches in their classrooms. Drawing on the second layer of Souto-Manning's (2013) theory—transformation of teaching—I highlighted both the successes and the tensions these teachers experienced in their efforts to create supportive and engaging learning environments for their students. This investigation revealed the particular strategies, techniques, and approaches these teachers developed and used in their attempts to teach for social justice and build classroom community, which, as the following chapters will reveal, have the potential to help teacher educators better prepare pre-service teachers to address the everyday realities of teaching.

Transformation of Society. I also analyzed teachers' individual and collective stories of transformation within a societal context to reveal their global implications and correlations. Drawing on the third layer of Souto-Manning's theory—transformation of society—I explored the ways in which our transformations of self and teaching related to our ability to transform the world. To approach this, I examined the ways in which our individual and collective ideas, practices, and stories related to the education system as a whole. This allowed me to contextualize our collective successes, failures, struggles, and challenges, and draw meaningful insights from their relationship to larger systemic issues. Through the trends in these teachers' narratives and their relationship to issues of teacher recruitment, retention, and burnout, I identified the relationship between teacher well-being and teachers' collective ability to transform society, creating a foundation to expand the research beyond this dissertation.

Analytical Approach

To analyze my data within and across these levels of transformation, I first conducted a thematic analysis of participants' interviews, reflections, and community conference calls, while choosing particularly rich narratives to bring to life the emerging trends. Conducting a thematic analysis throughout the inquiry allowed me to examine how particular narratives played out over extended periods of time, and within different spaces and places.

Initially, I analyzed the data using primarily a priori codes, which were derived from my research questions (see Chapter One), the guiding questions I asked participants during their first and second semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E & F), and the monthly prompts I emailed to participants to help guide their reflective process (see Appendix A). Specifically,

semi-structured interview and community conference call transcripts were analyzed for themes primarily using the a priori codes mentioned above (see Appendix G).

While I used these codes to begin the thematic analysis, grounded codes were also generated as new themes emerged, and my own understandings evolved throughout the process. The codes generated from the semi-structured interview questions and reflective prompts helped me to uncover themes across participants' experiences, and their individual reflections and community conversations allowed me to see how their personal and shared narratives evolved over time and across diverse community contexts.

While I operationalized several analytic tools to track the development of my thinking —like writing memos, taking notes of emerging themes, and developing codes—I quickly recognized that the growing number of themes emerging would have to be narrowed in preparation for the writing process. To synthesize my data, I clustered the emerging narratives around synchronous themes using Saldana's (2014) iterative, comprehensive qualitative coding guidelines. After reading and rereading teachers' individual narratives several times, and highlighting, coding, and taking notes on them, I pulled together the stories that I felt best reflected the complexities of teachers' experiences, and the transformations that occurred over time. I then drew on the personal stories that they shared with me and with each other over the course of our collective inquiry, as well as the themes that had clearly emerged, to craft an outline for our collective story.

Using this outline as foundation, I analyzed several in-depth stories, which I intentionally selected to exemplify the particular issues, narratives, and transformations that were unfolding across these eight teachers' unique teaching contexts. Although our collective inquiry started in

the midst of participants' transitions into their first year of teaching—and aimed to explore teachers' experiences during that year—I first chose to examine how their individual stories growing up shaped who they were and hoped to become as educators for social justice. Then, by following these teachers' narratives closely throughout the year, I hoped to illuminate the trends that unfolded in our journey, capturing the rich complexities of teacher identity development, well-being, and practice. While this in-depth approach to storytelling limited the number of narratives I could include in the dissertation, it afforded me the opportunity to craft a more elaborate, rich, and holistic story that I believe has the potential to reveal critical insights that other forms of analysis might otherwise overlook.

Chapter Four

Teaching for Social Justice: Individual Identities, Collective Struggles

I teach for those
with no parents at home
with no breakfast on tables
and no stories at night

I teach for those
who sleep on a mat
who sleep on the floor
and sleep on the street

I teach for those
with one parent at home
with one meal a day
and one story at night

I teach for those
who sleep in shared sheets
who sleep in shared beds
and sleep in shared space

I teach for those
with two parents at home
with two meals a day
and two stories at night

I teach for those
who sleep on fresh sheets
who sleep on fluffed pillows
and sleep on until dreams.

I educate for equity
I educate for peace
I educate for strength

I educate for change
I educate for progress
I educate for growth

I speak for yesterday
I live for today
and I teach for tomorrow.

—Lauren, Journal Entry, March 2015

This chapter shares the individual stories of eight first year teachers who I had taught and mentored during teacher education—stories of how and why they each decided to become educators for social justice, and how they collectively experienced the transition from teacher education into the classroom. It portrays the hopes, fears, and anticipations that arose as these teachers entered "the space between what was and what is to be" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 128), and describes the individual and collective stories of struggle they faced as their intentions to teach for social justice came into tension with the everyday realities of educating diverse young children in communities throughout the world. Together, these sections set the foundation for understanding how pre-service teachers "revise and reshape the story of [their] lives" (Capps & Ochs, 1995, p. 15) as they attempt to translate their socially just ideals into action in the classroom.

The Identity of a Social Justice Teacher

Lauren's powerful poem at the beginning of this chapter suggests that being a social justice educator is not just a label. It is an *identity*, a self-empowered choice to create social change at the individual, classroom, and societal level (Souto-Manning, 2013). There is no cookie-cutter job description or list of to-do's one can check off; no official social justice curriculum one can implement or certification one can attain; no finish line one can cross or tangible medal one can win. As Ayers et al. (1998) remind us, the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is an intangible one: "You can change the world" (p. xvii).

Teaching for social justice is about the journey, not the end result. It necessitates a desire to change and a commitment to personal growth. It demands that we continually re-evaluate and

re-contextualize our teaching, as our understandings of our self, our students, and our societies evolve (Souto-Manning, 2013). To be successful, growth must include the difficult task of teachers overcoming their own cultural biases and assumptions, as teachers' backgrounds are often significantly more privileged than those of their students (Gomez, 1994). Although every social justice educator has a unique story of becoming, what is consistent across the board is that *all* of us have a story to tell—and *all* of our stories, if we are truly committed to teaching for social justice, involve grappling with the complexities and complications of our own relationship to a system with so much inherent inequity (Banks, 1997; Gay, 2002).

Becoming an "agent of change" (Flores, 2007, p. 395) is not something that can be chosen for us. As teachers, we have the opportunity to choose this identity for ourselves. Freire (1970) reminds us that "Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle," (p. 186) and that it is through this struggle that liberation becomes a possibility. Some teachers courageously choose to embrace this path because of a past disempowering struggle that inspired them to remain neutral no longer (Freire, 1970; Kelly & Brandes, 2001). Other teachers choose to embrace this path because of an innate fire burning within—a passion to transform themselves, students, and society they have felt for as long as they can remember (Souto-Manning, 2013). Still others become inspired by realizing, through their experiences working in our currently under-resourced and over-standardized school system, that we have no choice but to practice critical consciousness to enact change—for if we do not "go against the grain," then who will (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Gay & Kirkland, 2003)?

Each of these eight teachers recognized that teaching for social justice "would not be the easy path" (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014). Yet, their experiences growing up instilled in

them a passion for impacting the lives of children and families that made taking the more difficult road the one worth traveling.

Lauren

> To me, teaching for social justice gives a voice to those who have been, or who currently are, silenced. It's about showing all sides of the story. It's about teaching love and acceptance. It's about teaching peace and tolerance.
>
> —Lauren, Reflection, August 2014

When I first met Lauren, she came off to me as a reserved, kind, passionate listener. However, as soon as she felt safe in my classroom, I realized that that she was *so* much more. Her way of being and her conviction to make a difference struck me—she had a fiery voice, an insurmountable passion, and the same drive to bring justice to children's lives as I did when I entered the profession. Unlike most of her white, female classmates, Lauren was never afraid to bring uncomfortable issues—like racism, classism, or oppression—to the forefront of our conversations. Lauren's provocative questions and reflective comments provoked deeper levels of problem posing and critical discourse, which, as research suggests, serves to effectively transform pre-service teachers' thoughts and actions (Freire, 1970; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004). Although she is likely too humble to admit it (especially because she identifies as a writer, not as a speaker), Lauren was often the catalyst for the most vulnerable conversations, and greatest transformations in our class. Within weeks of meeting Lauren, I knew that this woman would be in my life far beyond her two years in teacher education—as a thought partner, student, teacher, and friend. And indeed I was right.

Lauren first realized she wished to become an educator at the most difficult but pivotal point of her life. After her parents' divorce, her family separated across the nation. She slowly fell into depression. Her sophomore year, she made the decision to take a break from the world of academia to focus upon her own mental health. It was in this period of darkness that she came upon an unexpected light. She began to work as a caregiver for a young girl named Meghan, a nonverbal child with both physical and cognitive disabilities. During this time, she asked herself, "What *truly* makes me happy?" Through reflection, the answer became clear: "giving a voice to children, especially those who are silenced [like Meghan]" (Reflection, August 2014). Lauren came to realize that many children—especially low-income, minority students, and those with disabilities—are too often not presented with the opportunity to speak up for themselves and to create the lives they deserve (North, 2006; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Shakman et al., 2007). Little did she know at the time, her relationship with Meghan would not only be a source of healing for her during a period of great heartbreak, but would also inspire her to "grow into [her] own authentic self-hood" (Palmer, 2000, p. 16).

In that moment, Lauren knew that she was ready to commit her life to "fighting for students of every ethnicity, gender, culture, sexuality, socio-economic status, religious or non-religious affiliation, language, belief and background" (Reflection, August 2014). Yet, she knew she could not do this alone. "We must teach them to continue to fight for each other," she said (Reflection, August 2014). For Lauren, cultivating the space for students to discover their own agency is what teaching for social justice was, and still is, all about. When Lauren embraced a once in a lifetime opportunity to teach first grade in Honduras—in "an ancient Mayan city rich in culture but stricken with poverty" (Reflection, August 2014)—I felt compelled to support her

during what I imagined would be one of the most challenging and transformational chapters in her life's story. With a little creativity, I realized that we could build a bridge to connect Lauren to other social justice-oriented new teachers across time, space, and professional landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Upon hearing about this idea, Lauren told me: "I hope that this experience will always bring me back to reality, pushing me to a new potential, never allowing me to be completely satisfied" (Reflection, August 2014).

Within a few short days of being immersed in her Honduran school community, Lauren shared her clear intentions with me for her first grade students:

> I want my students to love and accept one another. Reading will happen. Writing will happen. Acceptance, unfortunately, does not just happen here… with the extreme class divides we see in Honduras, the incredible racism and classism that I have observed through interactions with the Honduran staff members, it is incredibly important for not only me, but for our staff as a whole, to teach children a deep respect for diversity. (Lauren, Reflection, August 2014)

Christa

> Teaching for social justice means creating and giving students the tools they need to create a community. It goes back to what I feel my role as an educator is… to create citizens not careers. Teaching for social justice means to teach qualities that I think are important for a society to embody; compassion, thoughtfulness, understanding…
>
> —Christa, Reflection, August 2014

Christa's life story began in a suburb in Wisconsin. From the start, she struggled to find her place in school because she could not seem to understand academic concepts. Unfortunately,

like the growing number of young children who get labeled as "internally deficient" (Valencia, 1997, p. 2), Christa was deemed "incompetent" before she even finished kindergarten, and thus, was held back. "I really struggled in the elementary days," she remembered as if it were yesterday.

> I didn't know my ABC's, things like that, that they expected you to know. I loved my first grade teacher because… one time I just didn't get it, and I bawled at my desk. Everyone went out to recess, and she scooped me up and put me on her lap and was so compassionate… She was so supportive when I was in shambles. She respected my feelings, and that's really what made me want to be a teacher. (Interview, December 2014)

Christa recognized early on that *one* supportive and loving relationship had the potential to make or break a student—like her relationship with her teacher did for her. Through reflection, Christa recognized that the love her teacher showed her was "an act of courage, not of fear," (hooks, 2000, p. 164) and became inspired to commit her life to being that loving person for others. Nothing seemed more fulfilling.

In teacher education, Christa grappled with the meaning of social justice. She truly wanted to believe that teaching for social justice was just "good teaching" (Cochran-Smith et. al., 2009); like many white, middle class pre-service teachers, conversations about racism, classism, sexism, and other inequities were easier for Christa to avoid than to confront (Sleeter et al., 2004). As her teacher educator, I knew that unless Christa had opportunities to deconstruct her unexamined biases in teacher education, her uncritical perspectives would continue to persist in her pedagogies (Long, et. al, 2014). When she accepted a first grade teaching position at the

same school she student-taught in, I intended to create a space to offer her authentic opportunities to continue to practice critical consciousness and transcend her subconscious avoidance techniques.

Christa's vision for teaching, which she shared with me during her transition, was to do more than just prepare children to be "college and career ready" (Reflection, August 2014). Like Grant (2010), she believed teaching was about the cultivation of a flourishing life, not just the narrow preparation for employment.

> I like to think of teaching as giving students the tools to create a life, not a career; to think of them as future citizens not future employees. I hope to create a classroom and community that is full of kindness, respect, mindfulness, acceptance, willingness, curiosity, etc. And in turn, the vision I have for myself is to *embody* and *practice* all of these qualities each and every day. I hope to create a classroom that values the process, is critical, and [is] non-compliant [with mandates] when [they are] without reason, because I want to see citizens who express these traits. (Christa, Reflection, August 2014)

Christa's intentions were not tied to academic performance, and could not be measured by an evaluative assessment; her intentions were about *being*—supporting her students in being loving, respectful, compassionate, and happy. bell hooks (2000) describes love as "a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust" (p. 131). For, Christa, love was the foundation for learning.

Marissa

> Teaching for social justice, to me, means doing what is best for a student, instead of doing what is best for your official evaluation… [it] means that teachers should not fear

> trusting their own instincts or professional judgments because the standards don't allow for that kind of deviation. Teaching for social justice is what inspired me to teach in the first place, and yet it is what I am currently afraid to do.
>
> —Marissa, Reflection, October 2014

Marissa's journey into education was inspired by the connection she felt to her city and family history, rather than by her own experiences in school. She recalled, "My parents and both sets of grandparents immigrated here; [and] their stories of culture and language, shame and pride, are what have always inspired me to do what I do. They grew up in the inner city of Chicago, with so much diversity, and still faced prejudice" (Interview, December 2014).

Unlike Christa, Marissa "never dreamed of becoming a teacher as a child" (Interview, December 2014). However, she quickly came to realize that she "had this deep connection with children," and in her words, would spend her summers "do[ing] what I loved to do: work[ing] with kids. I was a coach, a counselor, a Girl Scout leader, a summer school teacher…" Thinking back, she said, "I knew that I wanted to make a difference within the city of Chicago, and as I grew older the power of education only became more apparent to me" (Interview, December 2014).

Marissa shared that, initially, her interests in education were "more based on structure and protocol than on cultivating a classroom culture and community" (Interview, December 2014). However, these interests shifted dramatically as a result of our program, which integrated multicultural perspectives across all courses (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 1997; McAllister & Irvine, 2000):

> Over time I saw the teachings of my professors realized in my practicum classrooms—the classrooms that had a strong sense of identity, acceptance, and community were the classrooms that saw resilience and success. My practices then began to mirror those ideals—teaching content through the meaningful concepts of identity and community became what I strived for, and I can't thank my teacher preparation program enough for those life-changing perspectives. (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

As her instructor and supervisor for those two years, I was fortunate not just to witness, but also to play an integral role in her identity transformation: a shift from questioning "Who am I?" to declaring "This is who I am!" As Marissa grew, I grew, and our distinct roles as teacher and student began to blur—what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011) refer to as "working the dialectic" (p. 19). She too became my teacher, and I too became her student.

When she graduated and accepted a position teaching first grade in an inner-city public school in Chicago, there was no question whether or not we would "intentionally put our lives alongside [each] other's"(Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). I knew Marissa and I would continue to hold each other accountable for our intentions for ourselves and our teaching—and I looked forward to seeing the transformations that she would undergo in attempting to cultivate "identity, acceptance, and community" in her own classroom (Reflection, August 2014). In her first reflection she wrote to me before school started, she shared:

> I want to be mindful. Mindful about my planning, mindful about which students I pay attention to and mindful about my growth over the next year. I want to challenge myself to not just "get through" this first year, but to make meaningful contributions to this

> community and to my students. I am so looking forward to this correspondence and adventure with you by my side. (Marissa, Reflection, August 2014)

Elizabeth

> Teaching for social justice to me is providing my students with the exact same high-quality early childhood education that their counterparts are receiving a zip code away. I am very aware of the generational poverty, institutional racism, and other socio-political barriers my students and their families face. But none of that should impact the kind of education I provide for them.
>
> —Elizabeth, Reflection, August 2014

Elizabeth grew up in a suburb of Milwaukee—the city with one of the largest achievement gaps between racial and ethnically diverse students and their white counterparts in the United States (Beck, 2013). She entered teacher education, in her words, "very aware" of the racial and socioeconomic disparities in education; unlike Lauren, Christa, or Marissa, she had witnessed these injustices long before she had developed the capacity to understand them. By third grade, she was already cognizant of the fact that, for every child who looked like her and came from a white middle class family like hers, another child who had darker skin and often dirtier clothes, would be bussed from the city into her suburb for school. As she explained, "I went to a district that took kids from [inner city] Milwaukee for money. It was a crazy way to live" (Interview, December 2014).

Unfortunately, like many privileged children in her position, she internalized deficit perspectives early on (Valencia, 1997), believing that "the kids with black and brown skin are the naughty kids" (Interview, December 2014). As a young girl who was taught to "be respectful" in

school, she thought "the boys were scary because they would do things like throw desks." "Unfortunately," she stated, "these beliefs were reinforced all the way up through middle school for me. That was just what I thought from my lived experience" (Interview, December 2014). However, as she grew older, social complexities became more apparent. "It got more nuanced," which, as social justice pedagogical theories suggest (Rodgers, 2006; Garmon, 2005), and as Elizabeth came to realize, "was a good thing and what you want to happen" (Interview, December 2014). For, it provided the basis for her awareness and proclivity for reflection on how her personal narrative fit into the larger story of educational inequity.

By senior year of high school, an overwhelming feeling of sadness overtook her. Having grown up with white skin, straight A's, and a supportive family in a place characterized by "serious racial disparity and poverty" (Interview, December 2014), she could not help but compare her world to the worlds of her peers from other zip codes, who did not have access to the same opportunities as she did. "I was so sad for them. I was getting ready to go to college. And they were getting ready to be in a gang" (Interview, December 2014). Elizabeth could not ignore the oppression unfolding in the midst of her everyday reality. Yet, feeling guilty about it was not going to help create the change she wanted to see (Gay and Kirkland, 2003). For Hawkins (2013) reminds us that guilt is ineffective, and is often subconsciously employed by people of privilege as an avoidance tactic (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Guilt unknowingly keeps a person's awareness and energy focused on their own world—which in and of itself is a privilege—instead of using that energy as agency to work with communities to address the inequities that instigated feelings of guilt in the first place. "Realizing the drastic disparities is what started it for me," she said. "That was the tipping point… Maybe one day, I could be a

grownup that could create a different culture, even if it was just in my classroom, just for those kids" (Interview, December 2014).

However, even at that point, Elizabeth did not know for sure if she wanted to be a teacher, because she started to internalize the "voices in [her] head saying 'you could do anything you want'" (Interview, December 2014). These internal voices were stories of privilege that often, when projected, lead to escapism, and when internalized, lead to guilt (Hawkins, 2013). They were the voices that Elizabeth had internalized during her childhood that subconsciously made her believe that she was superior to her "peers in other zip codes," and thus had more choice, more potential for happiness, and deserved something more. Unfortunately, Elizabeth's internal dialogue is far from rare. In fact, that voice inside her head—"teaching? Well, you can do something better…"—is the same societal message turning thousands of young, talented leaders away from teaching (Haberman, 1987; Zeichner, 2003). Not necessarily because they do not want to teach, but because teaching is not appropriately valued in our current education system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014).

It was clear from the first day of my teacher education course that Elizabeth would play a critical role in the collective transformation of her entire cohort—and in my own transformation as a teacher educator. She brought a unique depth and strength to every conversation—a quiet conviction, I like to call it—which always pushed people to think critically, take responsibility, and stand up for their truths. Although she was not typically the first to speak up, when she did, *everyone* listened. In Marissa's words:

I felt like Elizabeth was light years ahead of all of us in her vision of herself as a teacher. She always had a vision, whereas we were all still grappling with what it meant to be a

> teacher/social justice educator. I'm always afraid that people like Elizabeth will realize that the U.S. treats teachers like garbage and they'll leave the profession because other jobs will appreciate them more. (Marissa, Reflection, June 2015)

Elizabeth's passion for children and equity, and her commitment to integrity, made me confident that no matter what happened after teacher education, our connection would never be broken. hooks (2005) reminds us that "Justice demands integrity. It's to have a moral universe—not only know what is right or wrong but to put things in perspective, weigh things" (as cited in Hall, 2009, p. 187). We both knew that there was so much more learning, growing, and weighing to do together. When Elizabeth got hired as a preschool teacher at a Head Start school in St. Paul, Minnesota, I knew that through this community of practice, we could continue our exploration together.

Elizabeth was inspired to embrace this project as an opportunity to collect the stories and advocate on behalf of her young students, who could not yet advocate for themselves. Similar to the ways in which I resonated with narrative inquiry (described in Chapter Three), Elizabeth too acknowledged the power of stories as "windows into individual and collective theories of realities" (Capps & Ochs, 1995, p. 21). "I know that my students have stories to tell," she told me.

> For me, part of my job as their teacher is to help them tell their stories. I can give these stories a voice, and by participating in this group, I can give these stories an audience. Teaching and writing are quite connected for me, and reflecting through writing feels like a natural part of my teaching practice. (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014)

Linh

> Teaching for social justice is about being able to build trusting, safe relationships with your students and their families… It is about being vocal, persistent, and precise about what you need in order to effectively teach, and about seeking and discovering all of the resources available to support your students, no matter the situation.
>
> —Linh, Reflection, August 2014

Like Elizabeth, Linh was also born and raised in Milwaukee, where she attended the same public schools she eventually came back to teach in. However, Linh's lived experiences growing up as a Vietnamese-American in the public school system were quite different than Elizabeth's. Linh's parents spoke only Vietnamese at home, so, like the growing population of emergent bilinguals in the United States, she entered school knowing little English (Marx, 2000). Once she learned English, she and her sister preferred to speak it at home despite their parents' wishes to keep the family language alive. The pressure to fit into the English-dominant "American culture"—a struggle facing millions of emerging bilingual students in today's hegemonic education system (Delpit, 2006)—had real impact on her education.

Feeling pulled between two worlds, Linh never felt like she found her voice in school. "I've been pretty quiet throughout my schooling experiences, even in the teaching program. I'm not… the person who's most outspoken. I've never been that way" (Interview, December 2014). Although she was afraid to—or, early on, didn't know how to—speak up or express her feelings, she "liked school." She became a great listener, and developed an inner strength and confidence through quiet observation that helped her stay connected to learning despite initial language barriers.

Linh's journey into teaching began long before she applied to the teacher education program—or was even aware of what college was. "When I was little," she described, "I would always play school" (Interview, December 2014). She proudly played the role of the teacher and encouraged her little sister to portray the student. At first, Linh thought "it was just for fun for me" (Interview, December 2014). Yet, her passion for teaching continued to strengthen as she began volunteering in elementary schools during high school and college. She realized, "I like this environment. I like working with young kids" (Interview, December 2014). Thus when the time came to choose a career path, she knew right away the direction she wanted to go.

After graduation, Linh was extremely clear about where she wanted to begin her next chapter. "I wanted to be home, and work with Milwaukee Public Schools, the school system I came through" (Interview, December 2014). As someone who "strongly believe[s] that the best way for preschool-aged children to learn is through lots of opportunities for play" (Reflection, August 2014), Linh recognized that her educational values and beliefs would likely come into conflict with her district's mandated preschool curriculum. Knowing that she would have the space to share her tensions with her peers and with me through our community of practice, however, helped ease her anxiety. "In reflecting with others," she said, "I am able to think about a situation differently, gain a new understanding, and even consider something I never did before" (Reflection, August 2014).

Mia

> To me, social justice means that every student will leave their high school education with choices… I want to make sure all my kids know that they have choices for their future, and that they can start building them when they are young.

—Mia, Reflection, September 2014

Mia was also one of the few women of color amongst the 25 pre-service teachers in my course, and because of this, felt a unique connection with Linh. Mia stated, "Even though we weren't the same 'color,' I felt like I had an unspoken connection with Linh when things got uncomfortable in classes" (Reflection, July 2015). However, unlike Linh, Mia "didn't even recognize what skin color [she] had" while growing up (Interview, December 2014). "I was color blind," she proclaimed after learning about the concept in teacher education (Ullucci et. al., 2011). "I knew I had a white mom and a black dad and my friends were all pretty much white… but, I never really thought about it." (Interview, December 2014)

Mia grew up in a suburb outside of Chicago, where she had the luxury of a quality public education and a supportive family. Her mother was a teacher, and helped Mia in school both academically and emotionally—particularly through her struggle with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, the same struggle facing 6.4 million children (11% of this age group 4-17 years) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Some of her teachers went above and beyond to provide Mia with different strategies to focus her mind; most, however, seemed to view her unique learning style as a deficiency, which left Mia feeling disengaged and incompetent (Valencia, 1997). Even with support from her family and access to resources, she still "bottled everything inside," and internalized the labels placed upon her (e.g., "She has focus problems!" "She can't listen!" "It's a lost cause") (Interview, December 2014). These labels perpetuated her insecurities.

In college, Mia decided to commit her life to ensuring that "kids don't have to put a label on what's different about them… instead, they can celebrate their differences" (Interview,

December 2014). She became especially interested in exposing diverse perspectives to children, who like her, grew up unexposed to the everyday realities of injustice and poverty. The realization that she had the power to help young students embrace, rather than ignore, difference inspired her to take a position teaching third grade at the same school she had attended as a child. In this role, she hoped to provide her students a different education than the one she received: "I want to acknowledge that there is color… and to address issues of race with kids in school" (Interview, December 2014).

Cynhia

> To teach for social justice is to provide a rigorous teaching and learning experience for kids that will prepare them for next year at the very least. I want kids to be in the classroom instead of in the office or with behavior specialists. I want them to want to come to school.
>
> —Cynhia, Reflection, August, 2014

Cynhia is a Taiwanese-American who spent her early years in Illinois living in what she considered a "racially diverse community" where "everyone was middle class" (Interview, December 2014). She excelled academically, and, in her words "was motivated and kind of just followed the rules." "When I was at those public schools," Cynhia humbly admitted, "my teachers would be like, you could probably skip a grade, and kids would make assumptions about how smart I was" (Interview, December 2014). Yet, her identity as a top student changed quickly when she moved and transferred to "a very competitive school," where she "all of a sudden became just average" (Interview, December 2014).

She vividly remembered being "surrounded by all upper middle class, white students, who had a lot of opportunities and privileges… and whose parents went to Ivy League schools and were doctors and lawyers" (Interview, December 2014). In this new setting, she felt different than her peers, looked different than her peers, and could not partake in some of the same activities that seemed to be the norm for her peers. "We weren't the wealthiest people," she reflected (Interview, December 2014). Unfortunately, Cynhia's experience of feeling "just average" and like an outsider in school due to socioeconomic disparities and racial differences is a common experience for millions of non-white students in the United States (Gomez, 1994). "I lost motivation in high school… and became… almost alternative" (Interview, December 2014).

A high school course she took on contemplative social themes transformed her disempowering experience of school by providing her with tools to make sense of and reframe her own story as a Taiwanese-American student. This process of inquiry and reflection inspired her to "[get] really into social activism" (Interview, December 2014), and motivated her to work with low-income, minority students in local schools. These students inspired in her a new sense of identity, community, and purpose: "I cried all the time, but I weirdly loved it. I had to keep doing this thing that tortures me. I loved the challenge of it. It made me feel so uncomfortable, but I felt like I was growing, so that was my pull, I think" (Interview, December 2014).

Before school began, she shared her vision for herself and the 35 predominantly African American and Latino fifth graders she would soon be teaching at a charter school in Oakland, California. "My vision for myself this year is to embrace change and continue to take risks both inside and outside of the classroom. I want to take failures in stride and learn from them" (Reflection, August 2014). Like Freire (1970), she wanted her classroom to serve as a site of

liberation, by creating the space for students to become their own agents of change. “My vision for my classroom is really to create a community where kids can find their voice and use it, where they feel like a part of a whole, where they have each other’s backs and where they really feel supported” (Reflection, August 2014).

Andrea

> Learning more about social justice and how education serves people differently inspired me to become a teacher and go back and serve a different population of students from myself.
>
> —Andrea, Reflection, August 2014

Andrea was born and raised in Madison, and attended the same public schools she ended up studying and working in during teacher education. She grew up as an only child with no father in the picture, and was on the lower side of the socioeconomic spectrum in comparison to most of her middle class peers. Andrea’s mother did not have the luxury of paying for tutors, travel, or extra-curricular activities without scholarship; but this did not stop Andrea from embracing her education with confidence and wonder. “All the way through high school,” she said, “I was a very motivated student. I loved school” (Interview, December 2014).

In hindsight, Andrew knew she “always deep down wanted to be a teacher” (Interview, December 2014). Yet it wasn’t until her courses in college “really opened [her] eyes to social justice and to the inequities in our educational system” (Interview, December 2014) that she realized her desire to teach. “Those things really lit a fire under me, and I decided that even though I loved the educational policy classes I took, I felt like I could do a lot more in a classroom with my kids” (Interview, December 2014).

I knew from day one of my introduction to early childhood education course that Andrea was authentically committed to embodying the social justice concepts we discussed in the classroom. In a class comprised of all white, middle class females (with the exception of Cynhia), students could have easily employed Gay and Kirkland's (2003) "avoidance techniques" to circumvent conversations about race, gender, class, and other social justice issues. However, Andrea did not tolerate silence or diversion. She spoke up, and held us all accountable—including me—to looking inside ourselves to explore the questions: "Where can *I* take responsibility? Where is my place in all of this?"

Upon graduation, Andrea chose to move across the country with Cynhia to teach kindergarten at the same charter school in Oakland, California. She knew that their journey over the next year would be characterized by transition and change, and set the intention to embrace, rather than resist, the unpredictability.

> My vision for myself is for this to be *a year of transformation.* I want to know that I've put my heart and soul into my work this year and have grown as a teacher and a person because of it. I want my students to also feel empowered by all that they know and can do by the end of the school year. I want them to be curious about the world around them and to feel safe enough to ask difficult questions in my classroom. I also want my students' parents to feel cared for, supported, and valued by my classroom and school. (Andrea, Reflection, August 2014)

Like Andrea, all of these teachers' intentions for transformation created the space for them to deepen their understandings of themselves, their teaching, and society as they transitioned into their new worlds (Souto-Manning, 2013).

In the Space Between: Transitioning From Teacher Education into the Classroom

For two years, these teachers learned in the same social justice-oriented courses, worked in the same schools, and became a part of the same community of like-minded pre-service teachers committed to teaching young children. Their intensive experiences across all layers of teacher education, as Cynhia describes, profoundly impacted their development as social justice educators:

> The school of education succeeded in getting me to think about the greater implications of education. I was continually and consistently confronted with questions like: "What is education?"; "What is the purpose of education?"; "Who has access to education?"; "Why is education important?" As my exposure to teaching and learning expanded, I was able to refine my answers to these questions. My education philosophy is no longer a jigsaw of theories pieced together haphazardly; my education philosophy reflects what I think is necessary in order for children to celebrate themselves and uncover agency within themselves. (Cynhia, Reflection, August 2014)

All of these teachers acknowledged the depth to which the "holistic multicultural approach" of their program impacted their thinking (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 1997). In theory, they understood how to teach for social justice; yet, they simultaneously realized that conceptually learning about multiculturalism within the context of a predominantly white, young group of women served as a potential barrier for deep understanding. Lauren recalled, "When we started talking about privilege, I realized that we are mostly 22 year-old white women. We had three girls who were not white. And that was it" (Lauren, Interview, December 2014). Talking

about issues of injustice at first left some of them feeling uncomfortable, and in some cases, guilty—a common reaction among middle class teachers in the initial stages of developing critical consciousness (Gay & Kirkland, 2013).

From Community to Isolation

> You move that tassel from right to left, leave [the university], and assume that this new world of professionalism will be filled with the same open-minded, forward-thinking individuals with which you just spent two years. Your heart breaks when you realize that you were wrong. *I was wrong.*
>
> —Lauren, Reflection, August 2014

It was not until their teacher education journey came to an end that they truly came to acknowledge the extent to which the specific community they had formed over the course of their two years together had served to support them in building their confidence as educators. Upon graduation, they, like teachers in former studies, had no choice but to confront how their worlds as new teachers would look and feel *without* the close-knit support system of their teacher education cohort (Flores, 2007; Kauffman et al., 2002). After having settled into her new home and school community in St. Paul, Elizabeth noticed,

> It has become apparent that I miss my cohort. While it was at times stressful, having a group of like-minded people support me as a teacher was essential to my growth. I believe I will miss this as I teach this year—I'm not sure I will be surrounded by as many people who hold views on education and childhood similar to my own (Elizabeth, Reflection, August, 2014).

Elizabeth did not want to lose this supportive, like-minded community. But, as her year to come would show, she would need to be able to cultivate community with colleagues and families with different cultural perspectives if she were to be successful. In her desire to stay connected, Elizabeth was definitely not alone—all of the transitioning teachers felt similarly, recognizing that, as Linh put it, "I'm sure that it will feel like a long year if I go through it alone" (Linh, Reflection, August 2014).

Fear and Doubt

Being alone was not the only fear that surfaced for these teachers during this period of transition. Christa revealed, "I am worried I won't be able to separate myself from the classroom even though I know it is in the best interest for all if I do. It is going to be a struggle for me to maintain balance" (Christa, Reflection, August 2014). This worry of Christa's around maintaining balance would indeed be a challenge during the transition, not only for her, but for all eight of these new teachers.

Before school started, most of them at some point questioned whether or not they could "be what [their] students would need [them] to be" (Mia, Reflection, August 2014). Their collective fear of being unable to fulfill on their intentions sometimes overwhelmed these soon-to-be-teachers, because they wanted to "be everything all of the time for all of [their] students and all of their families" (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014). While they did realize that "it really isn't possible" (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014) to be everything to all members of their school communities, the fact that many of them were, at least in part, driven by a desire "to help," would bring them face to face with the reality of their own limited perspectives and experiences. The tension between wanting to be it all, and beginning to realize

that there will never be enough time, space, or resources to do it all made them increasingly anxious, as past studies corroborate (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Kauffman et al., 2002).

For some teachers, like Mia, these fears revolved around particular groups of students: "My fear is that I won't be able to reach my lowest kids" (Mia, Reflection, August 2014). Underlying her use of the word "lowest" is the common deficit perspective that particular groups of students and families (e.g., low-income, racially and linguistically diverse) do not have the resources or "abilities" to "be successful in school" without teachers' "help" (i.e., savior complex) (Sleeter, 2001). Mia's example illuminates that some of the perspectives these teachers held about families and students after teacher education still greatly depended on their own privileged understandings of what "a good education should be" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Even though they recognized—on a rational level—that holding onto these fears would not help them or their students achieve success, they had a very difficult time letting them go on an emotional level. "I fear that I will become too hard on myself this upcoming year and lose confidence in my teaching abilities and knowledge," Linh acknowledged with trepidation (Linh, Reflection, August 2014). Her insight into her own emotional experience makes us realize the extent to which holding onto fears can actually limit teachers' and students' capacities to reach their fullest potential. And indeed, this self-doubt and fear of failure would need to be transcended in order for Linh, and others, to maintain their confidence and well-being as new teachers.

Excitement and Anticipation

Despite their experiences of fear, knowing that they were about to embark on the journey they had all been waiting for brought about strong feelings of excitement and joy. In the midst of

Lauren's transition into the unknown, she proclaimed, "I am scared. I am definitely scared… but I am so, so ready to begin" (Lauren, Reflection, August 2014). This shared feeling of readiness across the group was grounded in their passion for teaching children and an eagerness to "live the dream," as Andrea described it (Andrea, Reflection, August 2014). "I am so excited to meet my students, to see their smiling faces, to get to know what they love, what makes them tick, what excites them and what experiences they bring to our classroom," Lauren eagerly stated. "I'm excited to make them feel welcome, loved and respected" (Lauren, Reflection, August 2014).

Like Lauren, all eight teachers were looking forward to and grateful for the opportunity to "be a presence in the lives of young people and positively impact a community," and to "to be *that person* for some of [their] students" (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014). However, they did not yet understand the extent to which they would have to overcome their own fears, and transform their own limited perspectives to do so. As discussed in Chapter Two, teacher education research shows that beginning teachers struggle tremendously with the challenges of their new jobs (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Having been warned of this during teacher education, these teachers entered the field knowing that it would be hard. They knew that they were "going to make a lot of mistakes" (Andrea, Reflection, August 2014). They knew that this was "not the easy path" (Marissa, Reflection, August 2014). Lauren reminds us that:

> The moment you take on a class, you become not only a teacher, but a friend, a counselor, a nurse, a librarian, a custodian, a comedian, a social worker and sometimes even a parent. Whether you want these roles is really not up to you. You have them. Good

> teachers not only accept such roles, they *own* them; they *become* them in order to best meet the needs of every student (Lauren, Reflection, August 2014).

While they had no idea how hard their attempts to "be everything" for students and families would actually be, these teachers recognized that this was what they had signed up for when they made the commitment to become teachers for social justice. Before school, Marissa enthusiastically exclaimed, "I know that I will be doing what I love everyday, and I will feel the sense of community and accomplishment that drew me into this profession" (Marissa, Reflection, August 2014). Marissa's statement, and all eight teachers' stories above, reveal that, despite their fears and trepidations, their collective journey through teacher education had filled them with hope and excitement. They would need this hope to navigate the tensions that would inevitably arise during their attempts to translate their ideas from teacher education into action in the classroom. And, together, we would use our community of practice as a space to "learn and grow from our experiences" (Christa, Reflection, August 2014) by "help[ing] us more easily see our growth, the transformations of ourselves and our teaching" (Lauren, Reflection, August 2014).

From Theory To Practice: The Tensions Between Being and Becoming

Through their experience in teacher education, the teachers had internalized the foundational pillars of social justice pedagogical theories (which typically involve a combination of critical reflection, dialogue, inquiry, and equity pedagogy, as discussed in Chapter Two) (Banks & Banks, 1995; Freire, 1970; Jennings & Smith, 2002; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007). As the individual narratives in the previous section revealed, each teacher had a clear vision for

what kind of teacher they *wanted* to *become*; however, the conditions of their classrooms, schools, and school communities made the process of *being* this person far more difficult than they could have ever imagined. Through our storytelling process, the teachers grappled with the challenges they were experiencing as new members in their diverse school communities—tensions related to pedagogical practices, poverty and lack of resources, cultural and racial diversity, family relations, and transition. The narratives told throughout this new chapter revealed the inner turmoil teachers' experienced as their preexisting beliefs, ideals, and values came into friction with the new practices, people, and cultures characteristic of their new communities (Flores, 2007; Kardos & Johnson, 2007). This section highlights a handful of teachers' stories to exemplify the types of tensions that arose across their shared, yet diverse, experiences.

Pedagogical Differences Across Communities

In some cases, challenges directly involved a disconnect between pedagogical approaches learned in teacher education and the pedagogies employed by administration and staff in their new schools. Upon starting her teaching, Linh immediately noticed that developmentally inappropriate practices and deficit thinking were rampant across her staff (Valencia, 1997):

> The amount of yelling heard in each classroom is incredible. It seems to be something that is all over the school in every grade. One teacher values teaching through fear, literally "scaring the student" into listening or paying attention. The way they speak about parents and families is really demeaning—mocking families under welfare as lazy people who just sit at home all day, or claiming that the jobs that the students will probably get

> are bus drivers, garbage men, or cooks instead of jobs that require higher education. (Linh, Reflection, September 2014)

In this statement, it is clear that Linh's vision to "create a safe, kind and loving classroom community" (Linh, Reflection, August 2014) was in conflict with the deficit-based teaching practices of her colleagues. Although she was aware that these were not the types of practices she wanted to use, Linh found that fulfilling her vision within the daunting realities of teaching thirty young students with little support was far more difficult than she had originally expected:

> Being in a classroom of 30 four-year-olds… I almost feel like it's hard not to yell. As though it's the only way for me to be heard. I've felt myself become firmer and firmer, raising my voice higher to the point where I am almost yelling at the students… Yelling at students is not something I want to fall into the habit of—but it seems like it's something that all teachers at this school do. (Linh, Reflection, September 2014)

Despite Linh's good intentions, the contentious school culture and large class size made her, at times, act out of alignment with her commitment to building a "safe, kind, and loving classroom" (Linh, Reflection, August 2014). The internal tension this created, within a challenging external situation, resulted in her judging other staff members while simultaneously questioning herself. In this challenge, Linh had two choices. She could either place blame on the other teachers for "negatively" influencing her to yell at her students (decreasing her agency) (Valencia, 1997); or, she could take responsibility, and recognize that "[teachers] make the road by walking together" (Henning, 2013) and empathize with the fact that those teachers, too, were likely working to fulfill their "good intentions" while facing nearly insurmountable challenges.

Lauren revealed another case in which these teachers were confronted by pedagogical and cultural practices far outside the realm of what they deemed appropriate:

> The amount of developmentally inappropriate, culturally insensitive, and borderline inhumane teaching practices I have observed thus far into my first year of teaching is overwhelming. At first, you experience shock. You cannot wrap your mind around the notion of 25 six-year-olds forced to sit in silence for ninety minutes, slowly copying fourth grade level math problems off of the whiteboard. Your initial shock transforms to hurt, which quickly blooms into anger… So, you take that hurt, that anger and confusion, and push it down deep, until you can't hold it in any longer. (Lauren, Reflection, November 2014)

Although her courses in teacher education had introduced "teaching for struggle" as a tenet of social justice pedagogy, (Freire, 1970; Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010), Lauren did not realize the extent to which seeing these oppressive practices in action would break her heart. She was forced to struggle with the tension between wanting to stand up for her ideals, and having to face (and struggle to accept) the reality of the cultural norms in which she worked. On the one hand, she was not willing to look the other way and ignore practices she felt were unjust. On the other hand, she was not willing to let go of her preconceived understandings of what was "appropriate," which were not necessarily relevant within the context of this new country and culture. In this situation, her beliefs about the other teachers' pedagogies, and her reactions of shock and anger, created barriers that limited her ability to make the connections with teachers and families and have the impact she desired.

Like Lauren, others who pursued teaching positions in culturally, linguistically and racially diverse communities different from the ones they had worked in during teacher education felt like they were not fully prepared to address the needs of their new students and families. They entered these new communities with a theoretical understanding of concepts like "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and "social justice teaching" (Cochran-Smith, 2009), but had only had the opportunity to practically apply their understandings of these concepts within situated contexts (e.g., assigned practicum, student teaching placements, previous volunteer work, etc.).

Poverty and Lack of Resources

The contrast in contexts between prior teaching experiences and their new school environments were particularly severe for teachers who transitioned into high poverty, inner-city schools with far fewer resources than what they were used to. Marissa's reflection sheds light on how daunting the transition into unfamiliar urban school systems truly can be:

> I thought I was experiencing the difficulties that urban educators face [during teacher education]…But I wasn't. I got my roster the Friday before school started, and there were 22 kids on there. The first day of school, 27 showed up, but I wasn't given their names or anything. There were no extra desks in the school, so those kids had to sit on the carpet on their first day of school. (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

Marissa's statement shows how drastically different her new teaching environment was in comparison to her previous experiences with "urban education." In the beginning of the school year, Marissa still believed "[she] could do it" by drawing on the strategies she had used in student teaching:

> [During student teaching] I had some challenging kids, but I had a plan in place for them. They had great relationships with the principal, the social worker, the counselor, the psychologist. If I had a big eruption in my classroom, I could call the counselor… and I was like… I know how to handle urban education…(Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

That is, until the realities of teaching in a high-poverty, stressful environment where the once available resources were now nowhere to be found started to settle in:

> Then, I'm here, and I'm like, where's the book room? We don't have a book room. Who's the social worker? We don't have a social worker. Psychologist, where is the psychologist? She deals with 15 schools, and she's [never here]. And I was like, okay, [I] don't have that support, [I've] got to figure out another plan. And then kids just kept showing up (until I had 31), and then it was like, *okay, I don't have this.* (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

Marissa quickly went from feeling adequately prepared to feeling underprepared and overwhelmed. She did not have the support she felt she needed to translate the tools she had learned in teacher education into action within her new working conditions. Like Marissa, all the educators teaching in urban, under-resourced schools would have to come to terms with the fact that they could no longer rely on external sources for support, and thus, must find alternative ways to enact their ideals for social justice.

Racial and Cultural Tensions

> I am up against the stereotype of myself. Everybody thinks they know me. I am a college educated white girl here to save them all… and in a way, they are right. So what is my place? The answer, truthfully, is that I don't know.

—Elizabeth, Reflection, October 2014

Racial and cultural differences between these teachers and the communities in which they served created cultural barriers that caused major stress. Elizabeth, who was the only white person working within a homogenous African American school community, constantly found herself grappling with the fact that the social justice pedagogies she wholeheartedly believed would best support her students directly contradicted the cultural practices of both the parents and staff at her school:

> I was constantly in this culture shock, in an internal battle, asking myself: What is the right thing to do here? How do I respect all parties involved? How do I respect that that's their family's way of discipline, but also teach [students and families] that there's an alternative [way] and prepare them for schools that don't necessarily work that way. But also leave them room to be themselves. All these different things were coming at me. And I was just like, I don't know how to walk all these lines at once. (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014)

From Elizabeth's use of "them and their" language, it is clear that she feels like an outsider. Acknowledging that her determination is not only to respect, but also to "teach that there's an alternative way," reveals the fact that she struggles with the tension between wanting to impose her own ideals of social justice on her students and families while simultaneously wanting to respect and honor their culture. On a rational level, she grappled with and was able to verbalize these tensions; but on an *emotional* level, the major differences between her own experiences and beliefs and those prevalent among her school community were hard to

overcome. This disconnect inhibited her capacity to connect with the other teachers and staff at her school, and called into question her own identity as a social justice educator:

> In so many ways, I feel like an intruder at Head Start. Many people have made it clear to me that I will need to "toughen up" or "be stricter." I have also been told that I won't last long—that I'll run off to work for public schools before long. I am trying my best to be graceful in this situation. I am so tired everyday from everything that I have learned and experienced. (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014)

Elizabeth's uncomfortable story exemplifies the issues new teachers grapple with when they face the realities of working in communities whose values, lifestyles, and cultures clash with their own. Racial and cultural tensions were often amplified as a result of significant external factors (e.g., scripted curricula, English-only mandates, standardized tests, etc.) working against what these teachers and scholars would consider developmentally-appropriate and equitable pedagogies (Banks & Banks, 1995; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Villegas, 2007). This was especially true for Lauren, whose vision of social *injustic*e seemed to be the norm in her small culturally rich, yet poverty stricken town across the world.

> When you are asked *not* to converse with families through a multilingual lens, how do you create or maintain a home-school relationship? When you are forbidden to speak a child's home language in the classroom, how do you honor their knowledge and prior experience? When your curriculum talks about Jack-o-Lanterns and Trick-or-Treating in a culture that fears Halloween, where textbooks utilize "sled" and "sledding" as spelling words for a generation who has never seen snow, how on earth do you reach your students? (Lauren, Reflection, October 2014)

Like Lauren, most of these teachers found it difficult to maintain a sense of agency when they had little control over external factors profoundly impacting their ability to realize their visions for their students. This lack of agency (perceived and, in many cases, actual) often induced feelings of hopelessness. Yet, because these teachers, were motivated to take "a stand on social justice" (Nieto, 2000, p. 182), they were not willing to give up their agency—and thus, used our community of practice to find, grapple with, and overcome preexisting biases, assumptions and prejudices that could have been contributing to the barriers they faced.

Family Relationships and Involvement

One of the pillars of teaching for social justice is recognizing and collaborating with families as active agents in their children's education (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Moll et al., 1992). Mia's greatest tension in her transition was related to her struggle to bring this ideal into practice in a socioeconomically diverse classroom community. Interestingly, her initial fear of not "be[ing] able to reach [her] lowest kids" (Mia, Reflection, August 2014) manifested into a new fear once the school year began: not being able to satisfy the demands of her privileged, white families that attempted to exert influence and power in her classroom community (Apple, 2013).

> My assumptions of families in poverty have been completely squashed. I have parents who work two jobs and work [incredibly hard] to check their student's homework and make sure that they are playing outside and having a real childhood, not just sitting in front of a TV. The families I struggle with the most are the upper middle class [ones] in which parents think that they know how to better teach their children [than I do]. (Mia, Reflection, October 2014)

It has been well documented that families with more privilege—the majority of whom come from white, middle- to upper class neighborhoods—have more time and resources that enable them to actively participate in and exert their influence on their children's classroom communities (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). While parents' and families' engagement in school can provide much needed resources and student support, it also has the potential to contribute to continued socioeconomic and racial disparities, as parents naturally tend to focus specifically on their own children and other students who come from similar cultural backgrounds (Stacer & Perrucci, 2013). The additional pressure of these privileged parents' demands on Mia resulted in her taking attention away from those students whose parents were not as actively involved. Despite her previous intention to focus especially on providing quality education to students from less privileged families, she often felt obligated to meet the demands of those who were advocating the most.

As I read and analyzed her reflection, I wondered if the tension Mia was experiencing with what she referred to as "helicopter parents" (Mia, Interview, June 2015) was triggered by a deeper fear within herself that had yet to surface: the fear of her own story of privilege. I suspected that the discomfort she was experiencing in dealing with the "helicopter parents" was related to her own story of privilege and ignorance as a "colorblind" biracial student who had "never really thought about [race]" (Mia, Interview, December 2014)—a story that had yet to be fully acknowledged and transformed (Souto-Manning, 2013; Ullicci & Battery, 2011). I wondered whether internal shame, guilt, or fear were limiting her ability to uphold her ideals for educational equity, as Hawkins' (2013) research on these emotions suggests their effects could be.

The majority of these teachers had the opposite problem; they found it difficult to connect with families altogether due to prohibitive circumstances particularly common among low socioeconomic school communities (e.g., jail, mental health issues, multiple / nighttime jobs). This hurdle, for Marissa (and most of these other teachers), was about not having the chance to "relate to the families" at all: "Unfortunately I only get the chance to communicate with most parents three or four times a year. Not because they don't want to, but because their schedules don't allow it" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014).

As Mia's and Marissa's stories suggest, external barriers often limited these new teachers' capacities to cultivate the deep relationships with families they had envisioned before starting school.

Conflicting Visions of Various Stakeholders in Education

As the sections above revealed, new teachers experienced a wide range of tensions with various members of their new educational communities. During their transition into teaching, they often found that their families, colleagues, administrators, districts, students and themselves seemed to have different ideas, expectations, and demands regarding how to effectively teach diverse young children. As the following statement suggests, this range of stakeholder influence caused these new teachers to struggle to find and stay true to their own voice in the matter:

> The kids have an idea about what school is. I have an idea about what school is. The principal… the families… the teachers have an idea about what school is, and what teachers should and shouldn't be for a child, and what the child should and shouldn't learn. Everybody has different ideas about what school should be. (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

This wide range of perspectives about what education *should* be made these teachers question whether using the pedagogical practices they had learned about in teacher education could actually be implemented in their new environments (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). They had developed clear ideas about what "good and just teaching" should look like (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009); but these clear visions often clashed with the cultural practices and ideals of various stakeholders in their school community.

> The way that I would teach responsibility is by teaching empathy and by teaching how it makes you and your peers feel when you're responsible, and how it impacts others when you're irresponsible. But [this school's] way is like, you didn't bring your homework? Okay, you're going to go do your homework sitting next to the security guard while he yells at you. It's like shock….you put your hand on the stove. It's hot. That's how you learn not to get burned. Yes, that's great, natural consequences… but having a child sit and do their homework while they're being screamed at is *not* a natural consequence. It's a deliberate infliction of pain. (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

Seeing the drastically different perspectives and approaches of her school's teachers and administration caused Marissa to question whether—within the context of her new school's environment—she would ever realize the vision for herself as an educator that she had developed during teacher education. "The people who have been successful in this landscape don't have the same ideas of what school should be as I do. And so it's making me feel like I have the wrong idea and that I can't [be successful] in this school" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014). Marissa's feeling of disempowerment reflected the overwhelming nature of the challenges she and many of these other teachers perceived coming from seemingly every angle. With limited

resources and support, most teachers increasingly started to feel like the ideas they had cultivated during teacher education were not translatable due to the contrasting social and cultural norms of their new school community.

Disconnect Between Teacher Education and Teaching

The wide range of tensions left us all questioning whether or not it was even possible for a teacher education program to truly prepare teachers for the realities of teaching—especially in schools where terrible working conditions made effective teaching and learning a seemingly impossible feat (Chubbuck, 2008). During teacher education, the value of these teachers' preparation and courses had seemed obvious. Marissa shared:

> To think about a program that knew all of the problems in education and tried to get as much information into us as possible… made sense to me in the context of student teaching because I had a support system. If a problem came up, I could talk about it, implement it, and if it didn't work… I could go back, talk about it again, re-implement it… and then it would work. (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

However, as her support system drastically shifted and largely disappeared during her transition to teaching in Chicago Public Schools, her confidence in the education she had received and its applicability to her students and community dwindled:

> I'm four months in this school, and I feel like I'm regressing in my talent as a teacher because I'm adding more, more, more, and more… *I'm working harder but I'm not working smarter* because nothing I'm doing is working. (Marissa, Interview, December 2014)

As Marissa's reflections suggest, and as the claims made in Chapter Two literature review revealed, these teachers left teacher education with solid conceptual understandings of social justice based on their education and limited classroom experiences. However, many of them felt inadequately prepared to translate their socially just ideals into practice due to the differences in circumstance between teaching during teacher education and teaching in their own classrooms. To exacerbate the disconnect, the decrease in the level of support they received from teacher education to teaching was drastic, taking away the structures they had become accustomed to relying on for transformation. Without that support, these challenges seemed endless, and often left these teachers feeling overwhelmed, overworked, and undervalued.

Collective Identities, Purpose, and Struggle

> A lot of learning takes place when you take risks and do new things. But this learning is even more valuable if you can share these experiences with others and reflect together.
>
> —Elizabeth, Reflection, August 2014

We each have our own perspectives and stories of struggle and triumph, and we are also each inextricably related to the people and times within which we live. Creating the space for these teachers to deconstruct their biases and expand their perspectives in the context of community gave us all the opportunity to come to new understandings that we never would have been able to arrive at on our own. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) remind us: "Because of the deeply ingrained nature of our behavioral patterns, it is sometimes difficult to develop a critical perspective on our own behavior. For that reason alone, analysis occurring in a collaborative and cooperative environment is likely to lead to greater learning" (p. 25).

As Elizabeth's statement in the beginning of this section revealed, all eight of these teachers recognized that their capacity for transformation as a collective was much greater than their capacity for transformation as individuals. While each of these new teachers had a unique story of becoming a social justice educator, they all shared a similar passion for educational equity as a result of one, or a series, of lived experiences they had gone through before and/or during teacher education. These experiences were personal, and in some cases, founded upon perspectives that reflected their privilege (e.g., savior complexes, deficit perspectives, or guilty consciences). However, they each strived to actualize their visions for themselves and their teaching by working to transform these limited beliefs and expand their perspectives.

They began to realize just how much this transformation would be required as they *experienced* firsthand the stresses, challenges, and educational inequities inherent in our school system (Flores, 2007). As they continued to return back to the classroom everyday, they soon came to realize that their self-centered perspectives would inhibit their potential to create learning environments in which all of their students could thrive. Their unexamined biases of privilege would sabotage their ability to build meaningful trust and relationships with students and their families. Their savior complexes would be frustrated by a lack of immediate results and gratification, causing them to project that frustration onto their students and bring their own stress into the classroom. Their identities would be shaken, and their well-being would suffer within the under-supportive, under-resourced education system that so often diminishes the value of the teacher.

In their transition, these eight new teachers were faced with tremendous pressures and confronted with a choice: succumb to the stress and burnout endemic in our education system; or

transform their beliefs and their teaching practices in order to realize the “good intentions” they so passionately set before embarking on the real journey of *being* social justice educators.

Chapter Five

Well-Being and Teaching: The Critical Connection

This chapter explores how eight teachers' experiences of transition from teacher education into the classroom (described in Chapter Four) impacted their well-being, and how their own well-being related to their ability to uphold the visions they had set for themselves as social justice educators. To begin, I reveal how these teachers' well-being suffered as they attempted to navigate the tensions of transition into the classroom, leading to stress, disillusionment, and a decrease in morale. Next, I delve into the ways in which their students' outcomes in the classroom had a direct, reciprocal relationship to these teachers' own physical, mental, and emotional well-being (or lack thereof). Finally, I share how our community of practice made a collective commitment to cultivating well-being as a source of transformation and hope.

As the last chapter revealed, when these teachers started to teach, their good intentions continuously came into conflict with the everyday realities unfolding in their diverse classrooms and culturally rich new communities. Before teaching, they had believed that their teacher preparation program had given them the tools to become culturally-relevant, critically aware, and community-oriented educators. But, as soon as they *lived* the everyday realities of teaching, the depth of complexity became apparent and tensions arose with no simple solution in sight. In the face of these challenges, they often felt unprepared and did not know who to turn to for support. These teachers' feelings of isolation and self-doubt led to stress, which negatively impacted their well-being and ability to fulfill on their intentions for themselves, their students, and society (Souto-Manning, 2013).

The Physical, Mental, and Emotional Impact of Transition on Teacher Well-Being

Once I began working in my current position, I began to feel that the time I used to devote to my personal well-being was too selfish, and that I needed to focus more on my students. I no longer have the time nor the desire to carve out those moments for myself, which has led to a significant and noticeable decrease in overall health.

—Christa, Interview, December 2014

Overwhelmed, Overworked, and Under-Supported

These eight teachers had entered the classroom because of a passion for using education as a vehicle for social change. In the beginning of their transition into teaching, the newness of their experience, and the smiles on their children's faces made them "feel on top of the world" (Christa, Reflection, September 2014); but, as their stories in Chapter Four revealed, an overall shift from hope to hopelessness slowly became the prevailing state of mind in their individual and collective reflections. The challenges of teaching that they had once only read about were starting to feel very real and much bigger than they felt prepared to handle on their own (Chubbuck, 2008).

Despite the fact that these eight teachers graduated from one of the top-ranked social justice-oriented teacher education programs in the country, at times, they "did not feel adequately prepared to face the daunting realities of [their] new environment[s]" (Elizabeth, Phone Call, September 2014). Even Christa—who was hired to teach in the same classroom she had student taught in—commented that "the days seem so difficult that it is hard to let go and move on" (Christa, Reflection, January 2015). Although each of their communities were unique, all eight teachers consistently felt stressed and isolated, the same feelings affecting millions of teachers

working within the context of America's high-stakes, under-resourced education system (Agarwal et al., 2010). Sadly, the high demands placed on these new teachers, combined with the lack of support and resources they received to meet these demands, often resulted in them feeling like they were becoming the "burnt out teachers" that they had once frowned upon:

> I hate locking myself in my classroom every day, never being able to see the sunlight to plan and prepare—only to see minimal gains in reading scores. The first free moment I have during the day comes around at about 8pm and by that point I am scrambling to make phone calls to parents about students who are wreaking havoc in my room. I don't have a life outside of teaching… It has become a 24-hour work cycle because even when I'm not living it, I'm having nightmares about it. My classroom feels like a triage center. I'm not a perfectionist or workaholic by any means, but my God, I don't like to fail either, and it seems that no matter what I do I can't succeed. (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015)

Reading Marissa's reactive reflection about her experience brought tears to my eyes because I could feel her pain and relate to her shame. For, it had only been six years since I, too, was a first year teacher feeling just as lost as she was trying to navigate the daunting realities of teaching young children in our inner-city schools. However, through reflecting back on some of my own transformations as a teacher, I started to believe that her growing frustrations and lack of emotional balance might be causing her to project her frustrations onto her students, families and external circumstances, and revert to deficit-based forms of thinking (e.g., "students wreaking havoc in my room," "My classroom feels like a triage center," etc.) (Hawkins, 2013). I empathized with her situation, and knew how challenging it was to attempt to maintain an open

mind and positive attitude within seemingly hopeless situations—but I also wanted to see her take responsibility for her emotions and transform them into productive action. On the other side of the country in her fifth grade classroom in Oakland, California, Cynhia was expressing similar feelings of exhaustion and stress:

> I am feeling tired and overwhelmed… because I still do not have structures in place that are conducive to an effective learning environment. Just getting a call and response down is taking almost 2 months. I am in a constant battle with myself over whether or not I am being too hard and how is it possible that I have come to be this teacher that I am starting to dislike. I am overwhelmed because I know my students need more that I can give them at this point. (Cynhia, Reflection, October 2014)

Cynhia's overwhelming feelings, too, led her to a disempowered state of being in which she was "in a constant battle" with herself as she struggled to give her students what she believed they needed, both social-emotionally and academically. Like Marissa, instead of taking the time and space to directly manage her heightened levels of stress, she found herself becoming increasingly more anxious to the point where she "disliked" who she was being. Sadly, Marissa and Cynhia were not alone; within their stressful new environments, all eight of these teachers, similar to those in Kauffman et al's (2002) study, felt "lost at sea."

Unsustainable Coping Mechanisms

Through individual and collective storytelling, these teachers and I started to recognize that the increasing pressures placed on them were negatively impacting their mental and emotional health. The reflection below highlights the extent to which teaching started to take its toll on their well-being:

> I know that I can reasonably make more time to rejuvenate and ground myself without the lives of my students falling apart, but taking that step is like jumping off of a 50 ft. diving board. I know that I don't have to revamp my entire curriculum every week because something didn't work last week, but when you feel like you are drowning, you begin to think that flailing your arms more aggressively makes sense (even though you should be finding the balance of staying afloat and conserving energy until somebody throws you a buoy). (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015)

Marissa coped with her challenges through "working harder, not smarter" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014) and began to spend much of her time and effort thinking of ways to influence things that were actually outside of her control. Across the board, rather than taking moments to refresh and refuel themselves, or acknowledge their own accomplishments, these eight teachers' natural inclinations were to work harder on behalf of their students (and families). This coping mechanism often caused them to lose sight of taking care of their own well-being:

> My only coping mechanism has been to just keep plugging along without thinking too deeply about everything I should/could/would be doing if I had more time/money/motivation. (Andrea, Interview, December 2014)

"Plugging along," as Andrea puts it, was a way for these teachers to cope with overwhelming tensions in the short-run. However, in the long run, such strategies sacrificed their well-being, which diminished their ability to replenish and refuel the passion that had brought them to teach in the first place. This began to impact their morale; for, as Andrea reminds us, teaching is "such an emotional endeavor" (Andrea, Interview, December 2014). Failing to take time and space to honor the impact of these emotions on their interactions at school, along with

de-prioritizing the self-reflection critical for cultivating 'self-awareness' (Garmon, 2005), led to a self-perpetuating cycle of stress and burnout.

Diminishing Self-Care

With the overwhelming amount of curricula to learn, tasks to complete, students to teach, parents to work with, and so on, the teachers often removed self-care routines in an attempt to keep up. Christa, for example, who had always prided herself on being "an individual who values mental health, balance, and overall well-being," started the year practicing yoga every morning. "I'd wake up at 4:30, make juice, practice, and start the day with this amazingly positive mindset," she reminisced (Christa, Interview, December 2014). Yet, as the pressures to complete her never ending to-do lists increased, this wellness enthusiast soon found herself crossing more and more yoga classes off her calendar, "even though," she admitted, "I know they are what I need" (Christa, Interview, December 2014). Missing one class turned into two, and two to five, until, within a few short months, nearly all of her self-care routines had been eliminated.

While her teacher education program instilled in her deep values that still drive her to this day, she, like the other teachers, did not feel fully prepared to deal with the inevitable stresses she would face, as enumerated in Chapter Four. The pressures she put on herself to meet her students' needs prevented her from meeting her own:

> When I was a pre-service teacher I practiced yoga four times a week because no matter what paper, project, or lecture I had, my well-being was important. I can't say that anymore, though. [My students] mean a lot to me and I am trying so hard to do everything right. I feel like I put all this time and effort into every activity and project but I still don't feel like I'm doing it well enough. I worry all the time that I'm failing my

students and myself. *Where is the balance? I don't have it, yet."* (Christa, Reflection, November 2014)

In cutting out her self-care practices, Christa's mental and emotional well-being suffered. As a result, she increasingly blamed herself for "not being good enough" for her students (Christa, Interview, December 2014)—the exact fear that, in her reflections before school began, she had told me she wanted to overcome. Hawkins (2013) argues that fear of a situation tends to bring that situation into our lives, because of a subconscious tendency to manifest it. While her "good intentions" are founded on "coming into the classroom [everyday] with the best mindset for [herself] and each child" (Christa, Reflection, August 2014), blaming herself for failing her students, in practice, only limited her ability to show up with that positive mindset.

At the beginning of the school year, Christa told the rest of us that her intention was to teach her students "qualities that… are important for a society to embody like compassion, thoughtfulness, [and] understanding" (Christa, Reflection, August 2014). However, the fact that she began to lose compassion, thoughtfulness, and understanding in relationship with herself prevented her from embodying these values. The underlying problem (and reality) here is not that she is failing her students; it is that she is *thinking* she is failing her students, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy limiting her ability to be present in the classroom. This cycle illustrates that, as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) would say, the "root of the problem" (p. 34) is not about what teachers do, but is instead grounded in how teachers *think*. In this case, a lack of taking care of her own physical and mental well-being made Christa more susceptible to negative thoughts about herself and her students—creating a downward spiral.

Christa's emotional imbalance is exemplified further in a story she had written when attempting to squeeze a yoga class into what had quickly become an overbooked schedule:

> *I'm not going to make it.* A silent tear falls down my cheek. *I just wanted to go to yoga.* I stare straight ahead. *Why...* That's when it hits me. I begin to sob so hard the lines blur and I have to pull over. I scream, I scream so hard it feels like I'm tearing my tonsils. I cry so hard my temples begin to ache. And then I think of my students… because they are always on my mind whether I like it or not. And I think… all of this, because I missed a yoga class? (Christa, Reflection, November 2014)

No. Clearly, Christa did not break down simply because she had missed one yoga class. She broke down because she no longer had any space or time to breathe, release and let go of all the stresses that had been weighing on her heart and mind since school began. Because she focused entirely on her students, she no longer had any space left in her schedule to recharge, which made bottling up her negative emotions the only realistic option.

Unfortunately, Christa was not the only one who struggled to stay emotionally afloat; they *all* needed more balance. As the months passed, all eight teachers increasingly cut out their self-care routines, and in many cases, replaced their healthy habits with unhealthy ones, perpetuating their anxiety, stress, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Andrea and Cynhia stopped cooking to save time for planning, and instead, stocked their kitchens with boxes of processed microwavable macaroni and cheese, which they took to school for lunch. Lauren, who tended to release her stress through sweating, stopped running and practicing yoga, and in the most stressful times even reverted back to her old habits of smoking cigarettes, something she had promised herself she would never do again. "I have found that being in such a high stress

environment has made me regress into bad habits," she outwardly admitted. On a rational level, she recognized that "This is not only terrible for my physical self, but it also is about the worst thing that someone with an anxiety disorder can do to her mental health" (Lauren, Reflection, February 2015).

Yet, her emotional instability overpowered her ability to respond rationally, especially in high-stress situations. Her experience of being overwhelmed, combined with the fact that she did not have adequate support to help her find healthier ways to overcome her anxiety, left her with seemingly no other option but to choose the easier—and unhealthier—way out. Across the board, these teachers' unhealthy coping mechanisms depleted their energy, passion, and ability to be present, leaving them feeling "so burnt out, and lost" (Lauren, Reflection, December 2014).

In Marissa's case, instead of sticking to her evening gym routine to release her stress, she started staying at school well past dark, often in tears, with the fear that her principal (who had never stepped foot in her classroom) would think that she's "not doing enough."

> The scripted curriculums and the frameworks and the evaluations and the assessments are all building this fear inside of me that if I veer off course even just for a second, even just for one student, I may never teach in my district again. (Marissa, Reflection, September 2014)

As in the case of Christa above, Marissa's "paranoia of failure" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014) made her feel like she had to *do* more*,* which meant focusing less on who she was *being*, and thus failing to address the root of the problem.

Taking on the Trauma of their Students

> You can know, in your heart, who this child is, what this child has been through and what their behavior is reflective of. But the problem is, you still have a child who is throwing toys at your face while you're trying to read a story, right? That's my reality.
>
> —Elizabeth, Interview, March 2015

All of these teachers had spent two years in teacher education engaging in critical conversations about how to support and teach young children, especially those experiencing trauma or who live particularly challenging lives. Yet, as Andrea eventually discovered, "teacher education was like a vacation compared to teaching" (Andrea, Interview, July 2015). Back then, she admitted "I didn't even realize it though. That's the sad part." For these teachers, working with students experiencing trauma as a practicum and student teacher, and talking about how to best teach students within the context of "the university's Ivory Tower" (Borerro, 2009), was one thing. "In student teaching" Andrea recalled, "I didn't have to take care of any discipline issues. I didn't have to take care of any management. My kids already had systems in place, which I didn't even really see" (Andrea, Interview, July 2015). Although they consistently interacted with diverse ranges of students who had experienced trauma during teacher education, they still had the ability to walk away at the end of the day, because these "students were not [*their*] students" (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014).

As the stories in the previous sections highlighted, all these teachers very quickly discovered that they could not separate themselves from the students in their own classrooms. Whether it was sharing moments of joy, love, and inspiration, or hearing students reveal stories of pain, anger, sadness, and fear, they felt a deep connection with and responsibility for

supporting their students. These eight teachers had never experienced the extent of homelessness, violence, or poverty that some of their students lived in, and found themselves internalizing their students experiences of trauma (real or perceived) as their own:

> A lot of times they see it in social workers, or nurses, or firefighters, where you just see so much that you end up carrying the weight of all of these stories that you hear. And you, yourself, almost become traumatized vicariously through the people that you help and through the people you work with. (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015)

Elizabeth's story revealed that she was "carrying the weight" of the traumatic events she saw, heard, felt, and imagined her students experiencing, both in and outside the classroom. While it is possible that some of her own savior complexes (e.g., "the people that you help") were complicating this issue and exacerbating her experience of second hand trauma, Elizabeth still received no support in how to cope with her emotional reactions. The problem was not *how* second-hand trauma was addressed in her school community; it was with the fact that it *was not* addressed at all—despite the fact that her story suggests that her experience coping with her situation was having serious implications on her and other teachers' emotional and physical health:

> Because of everything that happened in my school community this year, by the end of the year, there were teachers who were just getting sick all the time, and the morale was really low. So we started talking about how second hand trauma is a real thing. It's not just you being soft or whatever… it's a real documentable phenomenon of people who spend their lives with people who struggle… You eventually start to carry that with you. (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015)

In these teachers' commitment to ensuring that every one of their students received an equitable education, they often carried the perceived struggles of their students with them into their own personal and professional lives. This emotional attachment—exhibited by their inability to maintain their morale in the face of their students' challenging circumstances—was coupled with a de-prioritization of taking care of themselves, ultimately undermining teachers' ability to sustainably take care of their students.

While I witnessed these teachers fall into the trap of feeling like a victim—the same trap that they, on our community calls, "wanted to be held accountable for avoiding" (Cynhia, Community Call, October 2014)—I wondered what could be done to support them in transforming their feelings of helplessness and stress into productive action as they traveled across times and into new spaces during their transition into the classroom (Clandinin, 2013). I was dismayed to learn that, over the first few months of the school year, there had been little to no training for these teachers to learn how to manage their own stress in order to improve their teaching. I wondered how our community of practice might become a space to support them in gaining the tools to enhance their well-being in the midst of their teaching experiences.

Teacher Well-Being and Effective Teaching

> No matter how I walk into the classroom feeling, my day is in complete unison to that of my students. I hope that someday I will learn to have more control over my emotions so that my positive feelings overcome the children's negative ones. I haven't worked that out yet.
>
> —Christa, Reflection, February 2015

The stories in the previous section reveal a critical problem often overlooked in today's academically driven and skills-based education system: Our teachers do not have the space to take care of themselves, which has significant negative effects on their ability to care for our children. Research on teaching and learning suggests that children learn best through modeling (Vygotsky, 1978); thus, *who* our teachers are *being* and *how* our teachers *interact* with students in the classroom have profound implications on students' social-emotional and academic learning (Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015).

The Connection Between Teacher and Student Well-Being

Through reflection, the teachers and I came to realize the intimate connection between their own well-being and their students' well-being. "This connection is the most obvious thing about teaching," Christa explained; "When I am calm and collected, my students are calm and collected" (Christa, Reflection, February 2015). On the flip side, as Marissa put it, "If I go insane, the kids go insane" (Marissa, Interview, June 2015). When the teachers came into the classroom "uptight or off" (Lauren, Reflection, February 2015), they found that their intuitive little students picked up on their stress immediately, and started mimicking their same behaviors. As Christa explained it, "they could sense my emotions, and a lot of the times would mirror them" (Christa, Reflection, February 2015).

This mirroring that these teachers noticed is not inexplicable; neuroscientists have discovered specific neurons called "mirror neurons" that provide a physiological foundation for an explanation of this phenomenon (Heyes, 2010). Mirror neurons are neurons in the brain that fire the same way when a person takes an action as when that person witnesses that same action in another (Iacobon, 2009). For example, if a student were to have an angry outburst, certain

neurons in their brain would fire—and if they were to witness a teacher having an angry outburst, those same neurons would ignite, and trigger a similar response in the body (Iacobon et al., 2005). The fact that witnessing an emotional action can trigger the same neural response as acting upon an emotion provides neurobiological evidence to support the fact that students' physical, mental, and emotional states indeed reflect that of their teachers, and vice versa. As Davidson (2016) reminds us, well-being is a skill that is "fundamentally no different than learning to play the cello" (Davidson, 2016, Para 1). Therefore, learning to control their own emotions can provide teachers an avenue to directly enhance students' emotional regulation. Cynhia, too, observed the way her students would mirror her emotions:

> They're so perceptive of everything. Kids just know how you're feeling before you know how you're feeling. If I was tired, they would be grumpy because I was tired. So I feel that if I want my kids to be happy, I *really* have to be happy. I have to love what I do for them to love being there. (Cynhia, Interview, June 2015)

As these teachers' stories show, during periods of contemplation, the connection between their own emotions and their students' emotions seemed obvious. In times when teachers were centered and present, they were consciously aware of the connection between their state of being and their students' state of being, and thus made positive choices in their teaching that were grounded in this understanding (as the next section will illuminate). Yet, as the previous section revealed, when overwhelming challenges arose—and the teachers started to feel increasingly anxious and stressed—their natural reaction was to "keep on keeping on" (Marissa, Reflection, October 2014) instead of taking a step back to breathe, reflect, and let go (Hawkins, 2013). Their tendency to de-prioritize reflection and self-care in times of stress caused their emotional

well-being to suffer, generating a reactive pattern to triggering situations that often unwittingly perpetuated a similar reactive pattern in their students.

> I know that, because I was so stressed out, it affected my classroom. My kids could tell that I was stressed out and that would irritate them too. And then the cycle would continue…The more irritated they were, the more stressed I became. (Cynhia, Interview, June 2015)

As these teachers' stories demonstrate, if they were stressed, frazzled, anxious, or upset, their students would often embody those same ways of being—for, they picked up these disruptive emotions quickly. To the contrary, when teachers took moments to center themselves and release their stress, their ability to surrender these negative emotions (Hawkins, 2013) and show up in a new way for their students was strengthened, leading to a more engaged educational experience.

Whole and Healthy Teaching

As Palmer (1998) says, "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher…" and "by choosing integrity, I become more whole" (p. 13). When these eight teachers carried with them the excitement, passion, and energy for teaching that they had cultivated before and during teacher education, their stories reflected a sense of wholeness and resiliency, even in challenging situations. Linh, for example, found out within her first month of teaching that she would be one of the two teachers at her school whose teaching position had been eliminated due to budget cuts. Outside of her control, and "after all of the time and effort [she had] spent building such strong relationships with the students and the families" (Linh,

Reflection, September 2014), she would soon be transferred to another pre-k classroom across town.

Even though she knew that, within weeks, she would have no choice but to leave the classroom community that she had come to love, Linh continued to stay true to her intentions to connect with and learn from students and families, and to instill the values of "kindness, safety, and positivity in her classroom community" (Linh, Reflection, August 2014). Her words below, which she shared in a reflection just a few days after learning of her impending departure, demonstrate her ability to stay positive and uphold her vision for herself as a social justice educator in the midst of stressful transitions.

> I have worked to *support* [the students] in taking care of each other when we are hurt or sad. It was amazing to see so many acts of kindness from these 4-year-olds. My students took care of newcomers who had a hard time transitioning into the classroom, tied each other's shoes, shared materials, helped each other color, etc. Building a strong relationship with the students and families was something I worked hard for and took time for… [and] we [saw] great progress in [the students'] academic and socio-emotional growth. (Linh, Reflection, September 2014)

Through staying true to her intentions, Linh was able to effectively create opportunities for her predominantly African American preschoolers to cultivate a classroom community that prioritized individual and collective well-being. The emphasis she placed on social-emotional development built a solid foundation for her students to stay engaged in learning and perform academically. When this transition presented itself, Linh was only a month into the school year, and the negative impacts of the stresses of her job described above had not yet undermined her

experience of wholeness as a teacher. As we will see in later sections, however, her ability to transcend stressful external circumstances and uphold her values would increasingly waver as the year wore on and her well-being diminished.

Marissa also revealed her ability to maintain her equanimity and to act from a place of peace and effectiveness in the face of a very different type of challenge early in the year: student violence in the classroom. In describing one incident (which happened during gym class), she said that a student had "left three giant marks in a kid's head, where he almost needed stitches because they were bleeding and so deep. And [the child] kept just kicking him and beating him" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014). She realized that she had the power to address this situation in one of two drastically different ways. "My options were, do we go to the network chief and get him suspended, or do we try to deal with this on our own? And I was like, let's deal with it on our own" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014). While this option was not the easier way out, she called upon Freire's (1970) words: "if the structure does not permit dialogue, the structure must be changed" (p. 54).

Drawing on the social justice-oriented pedagogical practices she had gained from teacher education, Marissa responded to the violence in ways that were aligned with her intentions to create a "classroom that had a strong sense of identity, acceptance, and community" (Marissa, Reflection, August 2014). Instead of sending the child away to be punished, she facilitated a teaching moment for everyone involved.

> We had a restorative circle where both the victim and the attacker cried and the entire class was engaged and respectfully listened while different perspectives were shared. We

> talked about what the victim needed, what the attacker needed and what the class needed. (Marissa, Reflection, November 2014)

Rather than taking the easy path and giving into the cultural norms at her school, which would have suggested that she bring in the security guard to remove the child, Marissa's sense of wholeness empowered her to "go against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1999) and uphold her social justice values by cultivating a sacred space for her classroom community to have "a peace circle." In her words, "Everybody came in and talked about it. And in the end, both students cried, and they hugged, and they never had a problem after that. They had tensions building, and that's why that happened, but now they're friends" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014).

At this point in the school year, Marissa had already started to "work all hours of the day" and her self-care routines had largely become replaced with "working harder but not smarter" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014). However, she still carried with her some of the hope, passion, and energy she had cultivated during her teacher education years, which encouraged her not to give up on her intentions despite the tensions she felt in upholding them. As the next section will reveal, however, Marissa would not always feel this encouraged—her deteriorating health and well-being would begin to lead to increasing reactivity and a reduction in her ability to hold these types of transformative spaces for students to reflect, problem pose, and engage in critical dialogue (three pillars that lie at the heart of social justice pedagogy) (Zeichner & Liston, 2013; Banks & Banks, 1995; Freire, 1970).

Elizabeth also entered the school year with vitality, optimism, and a sense of wholeness. Despite feeling and "being seen as an outsider" as the only white person working within her predominantly African American school community, within the classroom context she continued

to make choices that aligned with her social justice-oriented values (Elizabeth, Reflection, August 2014).

> Today, when one of my three-year-old boys was crying for his mommy, I let [him] sit on my lap and play. In front of [my student's] face, my assistant teacher said, "He's gonna get used to that, you know. You can't let one sit on your lap or the rest will expect the same. Soon he'll be following you around, expecting you to love him…" (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014)

Although faced with judgment from her colleague's conflicting views, Elizabeth felt that "it is developmentally appropriate and IMPORTANT for a child to connect with their teachers" (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014), so she chose to provide her student the love and nurturing she believed he needed in that moment. She stood strong to her commitment to equity by recognizing that, while this was not the typical approach taken with students who were crying in her school, she could give this child the attention he needed to feel safe and loved in her classroom community. However, Elizabeth was not just soft and coddling in every situation—in her wholeness, she made tough decisions that aligned with what she believed would empower her children to have agency. In her September reflection, she shared a story in which she stood for her classroom to be what Freire (1970) would refer to as a "site of liberation" as opposed to a "site of oppression."

> Today, when one of my students refused a hug from another student, I said something that I don't think I've said before: "You do not need to hug your friend, Sariah, because you are in charge of your body. You get to decide when you want to use your body to hug."

With so much emphasis on behavior management in today's skills-based education system, teachers often feel pressure to dictate to students how they are supposed to use their bodies in the classroom. Elizabeth's choice to give agency to her students, rather than dictate what they should or should not do with their bodies, empowered her to "feel like all of the studying and reading and reflecting has made a difference… to feel like [she is] *really* a teacher." (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014) In this state of integrity, she refused "to alienate humans from their own decision making [and] change them into objects" and instead created space for them to be their whole selves (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Her story also reveals her commitment to integrating the equity-oriented practices she had learned in teacher education into the classroom. Furthermore, Elizabeth's pride in her "inherent teacher skills"—which allowed her to help her students cultivate agency and voice within themselves—suggests that her internal definition of "teacher skills" is grounded in her social justice values. Expanding upon her feelings of the importance of agency, which she cultivated from her own experience growing up in a city with one of the largest racial and socioeconomic educational disparities in the country, Elizabeth shared:

> With any students—but especially with students who in various ways lack societal privilege—it is so important to teach ownership of self. I want my students to understand that they are in charge of their bodies and themselves. I am all too aware that they may need these lessons later in life. (Elizabeth, Reflection, September 2014)

Her language of being "all too aware" of the "lessons" her students would eventually need reveals underlying assumptions about her students' needs based on her own privileged experiences growing up near children in poverty (as discussed in Chapter Four). Despite these

assumptions, however, Elizabeth, upheld her vision for herself as a teacher for social justice by bringing her whole self to her teaching and giving her students choice as opposed to succumbing to the pressures to dictate student behavior from her school's cultural norms. As we will see, this capacity to transcend pressures would be greatly challenged as she continued to feel ostracized within a community whose cultural practices seemed so far removed from what she believed to be socially just.

Diminished Well-Being Undermines Good Intentions

The resiliency these teachers portrayed in overcoming challenges early on began to wear down under the prolonged stresses described in Chapter Four and above, which perpetuated their tendencies to engage in deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). As their well-being diminished, these very same teachers who had been finding joy and positive results with students increasingly found themselves taking action in the classroom in ways that directly contradicted their values and intentions. For example, during a particularly stressful time, Linh found herself "yelling so much more than [she] ever could have imagined" (Linh, Interview, June 2015).

> I think that my well-being and my students' well-being go hand in hand. For example, I remember that the month of January was very stressful after the long break when I was trying to reestablish our routines… [and] I was just NOT having it with my kids and spent an awful lot of time yelling. (Linh, Reflection, February 2015)

Linh's original vision she had set for her classroom was to teach "through lots of opportunities for play" (Linh, Reflection, August 2014); but in the moment, her own negative mood (emotional well-being) created a barrier to being playful (her intention). Through

reflecting together, we began to realize just how common it was for educators' emotions to enter into the classroom and impact the students.

> If I couldn't manage my emotions, there was no way that my kids could either… I was on edge and didn't manage [them] in the way that had been working for us before winter break… and sure enough 2 students who used to be very challenging for me to manage went back to their old ways of screaming and having outbursts. (Linh, Reflection, February 2015)

Through our collective inquiry, Linh realized the unavoidable impact of her own emotions on her students. When she was less stressed before winter break, she was able to find a way to manage her students effectively. However, during periods of higher stress—which correlates with a lack of mental-emotional well-being (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999)—her ability to support her students in the ways she had intended regressed. This shows up not only in her actions, but also in her discourse; in more positive narratives (as exemplified in her September reflection in the previous section), she uses the word "support" as opposed to the word "manage" to describe her perception of her role in addressing issues of behavior management. This shift in language in her stories from "support" to "manage" sheds light on the ways in which Linh's frustration created a need to control her students, as opposed to support them in controlling themselves.

Just one state away, Marissa started placing blame on her students for their "bad behavior" and low performance, rather than taking personal responsibility for how her way of being may have played a role in her students' reactive behaviors. After taking a step back, she shamefully admitted:

> I started to blame them. I was like, because you're acting up every day, it's your fault that I haven't seen my friends in four months. It's your fault that I'm yelling at my mom every night. It's your fault. I started to literally place that blame on my students. (Marissa, Interview, June 2015)

Not only were these blaming perspectives out of alignment with her authentic values; they directly contradicted the intentions she had initially set for herself. Just a few months before, she had said "my intention is to be mindful about my planning, mindful about which students I pay attention to, and mindful about my growth" (Marissa, Reflection, August 2014). Yet, due to the growing tensions she faced, combined with the lack of support and resources she received from her administration, she found herself becoming a person she no longer even recognized. When she finally had the space to breathe and reflect with me, she acknowledged that "Now, obviously, it's different, because I [know] it's not their fault. But because I had no space to ever leave my classroom mentally, I felt way more reactive than I was responsive" (Marissa, Interview, June 2015).

As Marissa's narrative reiterates, opportunities for these teachers to heal themselves through self-reflection and self-care were rare, or in certain cases, nonexistent. When they did not prioritize their well-being, their reactive behaviors often trumped their ability to respond the way that they ideally would have wanted to. In both Linh's and Marissa's stories, they each found themselves blindly projecting their stress and frustrations onto their students. Despite the fact that their reactive behaviors in the classroom (e.g., blaming, yelling, projecting) prevented them from embodying the types of social-emotional skills they hoped to instill in their students, in the high-stress moment, they "could not recognize the impact" (Marissa, Interview, June

2015). As Marissa's statement above revealed, the teachers' unconscious cycle of reactivity often dominated their pedagogical practices when they did not make space to mentally and emotionally decompress. Only when our community of practice—a support system that few teachers have—fostered the space for these teachers to reflect and feel supported did they start to recognize the impact of their diminishing well-being on their teaching.

Prolonged Teacher Stress Leads to Burnout

> I am hoping that my classroom is a safe space for my students and a welcoming place for their families. I hope to come to all of them with grace, openness, and ultimately empathy. I hope that they know I am looking to learn from them and with them through the school year. Like I have written before, I hope to be a constant force and unconditional love and endless curiosity.
>
> —Elizabeth, Reflection, August 2014

Elizabeth, who I would argue was incredibly professional and seemed more prepared to teach in a highly impoverished school than the majority of her graduating class, started the school year eager to play an unconditionally loving and positive role in the lives of her students and families, all of whom lived in poverty. However, after spending a few short months feeling powerless and suffering within the context of her high-stress staff environment, she felt as if her experience had taken an irreversible emotional toll on her.

> It was just bad. And I was like how am I going to do this for much longer getting paid nothing… $15 an hour. How am I?…this is not sustainable for me. *I will burn out.* I will end up leaving teaching because I've seen so much pain and so much hurt in these kids. And I've seen so many people do nothing about it. And I've only been here for three

months, and if I do this for three more months, I don't know who I'm going to become. (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014)

Elizabeth began to question her own sense of identity—an essential component of career- and social well-being, according to Chopra (2015). This evoked a fear of the future; a fear of who she was "going to become" if she remained in her current state of suffering. The seemingly insurmountable barrier between her own vision for teaching for social justice and the external environment of her school led to an inability to remember and sustain her own agency, believing that the hurt and pain she saw in her students was inevitably going to cause *her* to burn out. With the benefit of hindsight and time to analyze her stories, I realized that it was the attachment to changing her environment and relieving the pain and hurt she saw in her students (elements of a "savior complex" discussed previously) that was taking an irreversible emotional toll (Hawkins, 2013).

Elizabeth at the time, however, did not have the fortune of the months of reflection that we do now, and did not see any way to alleviate her own suffering other than leaving her school. She had to confront a scary question that far too many new teachers—especially novice white teachers teaching in diverse, high poverty, under-resourced schools (Agarwal et al., 2010)—end up asking themselves: Do I stay and become one of *those* teachers who leaves the profession due to burn out? Or do I prioritize my well-being by changing school environments so I can make an impact on more children in the long run?

When presented with the opportunity to teach in another school with similar demographics of students (predominantly African American, free and reduced lunch, with single mothers) with what she perceived would be a more collaborative and pedagogically-aligned staff,

this once hopeful teacher shared her story of having to come to terms with making a difficult choice:

> So I had to make this choice to save myself so I can help more kids in the future. Because if I keep pouring everything I have into [my students], I might not end up okay. I might end up just bitter. And that was two weeks before I left. So I got hired at a public school to teach 4-year-old preschool. I gave my two weeks notice. And things did start rolling. (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014).

At first, I was extremely disheartened by Elizabeth's choice; this was a teacher who, after teacher education, authentically wanted to commit her entire career and life to "giving kids a space in the world" and "using [her] position of power in the system to tell their stories the right way" (Elizabeth, Reflection, August 2014). It was clear to me that, with the stress she was experiencing, she had regressed into the "savior" mentality of needing to "help" her students —the very perspective she had worked to free herself from in teacher education. I noticed myself asking questions like: "How could *she* leave her students? Isn't *she* just perpetuating the problem?" She had graduated from teacher education with a reflective awareness of her own privilege and savior tendencies, with the intention of fighting at her students' side through the struggle (Freire, 1970), despite the fact that she knew she would "be seen as an outsider" (Elizabeth, Reflection, October 2014). I was shocked to witness the incredible decrease in morale Elizabeth experienced in just three short months, and deeply troubled by the fact that this passionate educator had felt that she had no other choice but to leave the students she loved so dearly.

However, after reviewing and reflecting upon Elizabeth's story in the context of the other teachers' narratives, I began to connect her choice to leave her school with the larger issue I was seeing across all these teachers' stories: a decline in teachers' physical, mental, and emotional well-being. When I stopped looking at Elizabeth's situation as an isolated incident—and chose instead to see it within the context of the larger systemic issues at play—I saw that her story had the potential to provide critical insights into why an astonishing 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Lambert, 2006). The conflict, heartbreak, and complexity apparent in Elizabeth's narratives convey the authentic, deep struggle she went through in dealing with her feelings of stress, under-appreciation, and being overwhelmed. And without *any* support for her own well-being (outside of our community of practice), it was no wonder that she had lost sight of her hope and chosen to make a change.

I argue that, while blaming Elizabeth for leaving may be the easier way out, taking the time to understand the context of her actions—and those of the thousands of other incredibly driven and passionate teachers who leave due to burnout (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999)—is the only way to honor teachers' experiences, and ultimately, to cultivate systemic transformation. Instead of responding reactively to Elizabeth's actions (and giving away *my* own agency), I began to think proactively, posing new questions to myself such as: Why aren't we looking at *why* these teachers are leaving, as opposed to blaming teachers for doing so? How is our system supporting teachers like Elizabeth so they *can* do this? And, how could our community of practice support each of these eight educators in a way that could have ripple effects on the education system at large? These became the questions that these teachers and I felt compelled to explore.

Hopeless Transitions with Hopeful Horizons

When teachers did not adequately manage their own well-being, teaching and learning suffered, especially for teachers whose overwhelming class sizes and lack of administrative support already posed a huge barrier to effective instruction. Interestingly, even teachers like Mia and Christa, who in comparison to the other teachers "had it easy" (Mia, Interview, December 2014), still experienced high levels of stress, which often prevented them from *being* the compassionate, loving, and empowering role models they initially intended to become (Christa & Mia, Reflections, August 2014). Overall, the high level of external demands placed upon them, coupled with internal pressures they imposed upon themselves, limited their capacity to maintain their well-being and engage in the social justice pedagogies they had originally intended to integrate into their classrooms.

"Unfortunately," Mia admitted, "with how much stuff and how much time we have in the day, I feel like I never get into those deep conversations" (Mia, Interview, December 2014). Even Christa, who from the beginning recognized the critical need to embody the same qualities she hoped to instill in her students, still put herself last in moments of being overwhelmed, as her narratives in this chapter revealed. Lauren attributed this pattern to the fact that "When you put so much effort into your practice, into your management, into the well-being of your students, it's easy to forget about yourself" (Lauren, Reflection, February 2015).

As this chapter reveals, opportunities for these teachers to heal themselves through self-reflection and self-care were rare, or in certain cases, nonexistent. Marissa's inability to express her feelings, combined with "the fact that every minute of the day [she was] told where

[she] needed to be, what [she] needed to be doing, [and] what [she] needed to be saying" made her feel like "[her] talent was being wasted" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014). Unfortunately, these sentiments appeared in the narratives of all those whose administrators valued standardized testing and banking approaches to education (Freire, 1970) over less-traditional, student-centered pedagogical approaches.

These conflicting ideals between novice teachers and policies of their new school communities had significant implications on their self-concepts and self-confidence. Marissa said, "I feel disrespected and de-professionalized because I'm a smart, capable, talented human being, and I don't need to be at a job where someone is telling me to be a robot…it doesn't feel good to me" (Marissa, Interview, June 2015). Despite feeling undervalued for what she does have to contribute, she also acknowledges that she does not have all the answers: "I need to learn how to let go, while still pulling my students even closer" (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015).

It is critical that teachers be empowered to have and express their agency, rather than be "treated as robots," if we are to foster teachers who can effectively translate their ideals from teacher education into action in the classroom. As this chapter revealed, the lack of support and agency these teachers experienced seemed to have an irreversible impact on their physical, mental, and emotional health, which inhibited their ability to *show up* as the smart, capable, talented people they had dreamed of *becoming* for themselves, their students, and their worlds (Souto-Manning, 2013). The disheartening quote below illustrates this spiral of diminishing well-being and disempowerment these transitioning teachers found themselves in:

> I'm just a lot more sad… I don't feel like I have the same vibrant energy that I did before… I'm diminished. And it's not [the students'] fault… I'm definitely changed after

> the first year of teaching [and] it was not really a good change. I would like to go back to how I was before. But I don't think I ever will. (Marissa, Interview, June 2015)

Lauren's words reveal similar sentiments: "I feel unimportant. I feel underappreciated. I feel belittled" (Lauren, Reflection, October 2014). Through our collective process of storytelling, we began to recognize that *every* teacher was experiencing *this same* spiral of disempowerment—a collective decline in their own physical, mental, and emotional well-being that was directly impacting their abilities to teach and create positive learning environments. Through our shared reflection and commitment, we began to find purpose and hope in reversing this negative spiral and leveraging the connection between teaching and well-being in a positive, empowering way.

Renewing Hope through Reflection, Connection, and Devotion

Despite all of the tensions described previously, and all of the ways in which their well-being and teaching suffered as a result, these teachers kept coming back for one clear purpose: their *students*. At times, they questioned whether they would ever truly be able to transform these children's lives the way that they had once thought they could. Especially in moments of totally being overwhelmed, their feelings of hopelessness made their once big dreams of changing the unjust system seem like unattainable illusions—for how could they change a system that had already disempowered them?

Freire (1970) reminds us that "Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who [we] are so that [we] can more wisely build the future" (p. 84). As their collective stories reveal, these eight new teachers were engaged in an ongoing dance between hope and hopelessness, light and darkness, and justice and injustice. As they

increasingly expanded beyond the confines of their limited individual experiences and into community, they became better able to understand and transform themselves, their teaching, and society, as the next chapter will reveal (Souto-Manning, 2013). By piecing together their isolated stories (which, to the individual teacher, often felt like the *only* story in moments of uncertainty and fear), a more holistic picture of the larger systemic injustices at play began to reveal itself.

As they continued to engage in conversations with themselves, each other, and me, they realized that their personal struggles were struggles of context. On the individual level, Christa's experience teaching 18 predominantly white, lower to middle class first graders with a supportive administration, was a completely different experience than Marissa's struggle to teach 31 African American and Latino inner-city first graders in a classroom with broken walls and too few desks. These struggles were completely different than those Lauren was simultaneously experiencing in her first grade classroom in a Spanish-speaking third world country on the other side of the globe. Yet, despite how unique their individual experiences of teaching may have been, reflecting on their individual stories within the context of the collective revealed universal insights.

Across the board, all of these teachers' experiences of struggle profoundly impacted their physical, mental, and emotional health, which had significant implications on who they were *being* and how they were teaching. Through putting together each piece of what often felt like a disjointed puzzle, these teachers would soon come to discover that certain moments they experienced as failure at the time would ultimately lead to the greatest transformations. As the reflective journey continued, they would witness their greatest breakdowns transform into their

greatest breakthroughs—that is, if and when they were willing to give themselves the space to "breathe, reflect, and try something new" (Lauren, Reflection, September 2014).

Despite all the questioning, the hopelessness, the tears, the sleepless nights, and the internal struggles, none of these young women were ready to go home. They knew that there was more work to do: more students to support, more smiles to make, and more inspiration to share. Their hearts were in it. The stories in this chapter summarize the complexities of the teaching puzzle; those to come will reveal what would become possible for these teachers when they remained hopeful, especially in moments when everything seemed hopeless.

Chapter Six

A Return to Wholeness—Healing the Self to Heal the World

The Teaching Puzzle: A Vignette from Lauren's Experience

Teaching has been much like putting together one of those 500 piece puzzles. You know the end result you desire, but have no clue just how to make it happen. So you start with the outside pieces, activities that are sure to inspire and set the foundation to take on larger challenges. You sing, you move, you laugh, you love. However, these moments of victory are surrounded by what feels like a never ending uphill battle to truly reach 45 emergent bilingual children.

You struggle to find what fits for your students, what fits for your school and what fits for you as an educator. You curse in solitude, you cry in front of your director, you slam your head into the table hoping that just maybe the sheer force of your face against those hundreds of oddly-shaped puzzle pieces will somehow make them fit. However, losing your cool does nothing for your practice, does nothing for your students.

You love these kids.

So you breathe, reflect, and try something new.

Then suddenly, as if out of nowhere, you finally see it. A glimpse of color, a texture, a pattern that appears to go together. You find another, and yet another. Before you know it, you have completed an entire corner of this wackadoo puzzle of teaching. Your students respond to "Hey, Hey, Hey!" with an adorable "YYYYESSSSSSSS!" (complete with the Honduran j/y accent). They sit at their seats and use hand signals to show you that they need water, to use the bathroom, or have a question rather than screaming "MISS. MISS. MISS. MISS. MISS" or shoving their completed project into your little, overwhelmed first-year teacher face.

You realize that the entire class is completely overstimulated. You raise an eyebrow, give your best, "Yo, I'm watching you guys" kind of face, and watch in amazement as one student BRINGS HIS HANDS TO HEART CENTER, CLOSES HIS EYES AND TAKES THREE DEEP BREATHS.

And that's just it.
Your heart is filled.
Your soul is renewed.

You cry at your dining room table in reflection while updating your blog because you are just so happy to be where you are.

What an adventure it has been. What a journey. What a roller coaster. Every day I experience both moments of success and moments of what I initially view as failure. However, I know that every weakness is only a strength in need of improvement. We, as a learning community, did not "fail" a lesson or activity today; we just need another go around. We need a change in instruction style, an increase in differentiation, more visuals,

> more modeling, or perhaps just ditch the whole thing together and try something totally different. It has been a lot of up and down, a lot of give and take, but I leave our beautiful campus every day with a smile no matter how physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted I may be from a day's work as a first-year teacher.
>
> **I'm not going home**.
>
> —Lauren, Reflection, September 2014

In Chapter Four, I revealed these eight teachers' stories of becoming, and described the challenges they faced during their transitions from teacher education into the classroom. In Chapter Five, I explored how these tensions led to stress, burnout, and a lack of physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and went on to reveal how teacher well-being (or lack thereof) relates closely to teaching. In this chapter, I build on this foundation to describe how, through realizing the implications of teacher well-being on students and, in some cases, entire school communities, our community of practice committed to finding inner strength to cope with and transform our external circumstances. I explain how, through this devotion to healing the self and expanding self-awareness, we identified and integrated practices for cultivating wellness that transformed not only our own selves, but also our teaching. I conclude by setting the stage for the final chapter, which reveals the potential our community of practice's work has to transform the education system as a whole—and how, through this dissertation's evolution, that transformation has already begun.

New Questions, New Conversations

Through sharing stories in our community of practice, we came to realize that while teachers had gained a solid conceptual understanding of social justice pedagogy, they *had not* been equipped with the tools (nor did most of them have support structures in place) to help them

maintain their own mental and emotional stability as they attempted to implement this knowledge under the pressures of teaching in the real world. As Chapter Five revealed, each of them consistently demonstrated a reflexive awareness of *who* they wanted to be as a teacher, but simultaneously revealed a propensity to lose sight of that awareness when they felt stressed or overwhelmed.

In coming to this understanding, I became intensely curious about the ways in which supporting teachers' physical, mental, and emotional well-being could impact both teaching and learning (Davidson et al., 2003; Flook et al., 2013), and expanded my research to account for the exploration of how teachers can collectively overcome the negative impacts of stress on well-being and teaching. In light of this, I began facilitating conversations within our community of practice to cultivate a deeper understanding of the relationship between well-being and teaching. I also encouraged these teachers to take more time for self-care and self-reflection, and to collectively explore how we could leverage this connection as a means of fulfilling on our intentions as social justice educators. To do my part, I made a commitment to taking care of my own well-being—for if their stress was impacting mine, I figured, then my stress (as their teacher) must also be impacting theirs.

A New Understanding of Teaching for Social Justice

About half way through the school year, when I visited and interviewed each teacher for this project, a shift seemed to be happening in their conversations around social justice. While they still connected to their prior definitions of social justice on a conceptual level, their

experiences *living* the realities of educational inequity alongside their students everyday had shifted their narratives.

> I used to think that teaching for social justice meant transforming the system from the ground up—meaning changing structures entirely. Now that I am actually teaching, I am seeing how difficult that actually is, especially when you have no idea what [transforming the system] entails or what it would look like. (Cynhia, Reflection, November 2014)

Cynhia's quote illuminates the contrast between teachers' conceptual understandings of social justice they developed in teacher education and their experiences attempting to actually teach in a socially just way. Witnessing firsthand the impact that inequity and poverty were having on their students—while simultaneously deepening their awareness of systemic injustices through listening to each other's stories—made them realize that social justice was a much more complex issue than they had realized prior to teaching (something that no teacher education program could have prepared them for within the context of the ivory tower). The injustices had to be *experienced* to be understood (Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

Accepting the "Tragic Gap" Between Reality and Possibility

> By the tragic gap I mean the gap between the hard realities around us and what we *know* is possible—not because we wish it were so, but because we've seen it with our own eyes. For example, we see greed all around us, but we've also seen generosity. We hear a doctrine of radical individualism that says, *Everyone for him- or herself*, but we also know that people can come together in community and make common cause.
>
> —Parker J. Palmer, 2012, The Sun [interview], section 5, para. 3

To address the critical questions regarding how teachers could overcome the negative impacts of stress on their pedagogy, we would need to reframe our understanding of teaching for social justice within the complex realities in which teachers live and work. Previous chapters revealed that teachers' "good intentions" were often undermined by the deterioration of their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, which led to cycles of stress, reactivity, and in some cases, to burnout. In order for our community of practice to transform these negative cycles, we needed to evolve our visions for our own identities as social justice educators so that we could have a realistic idea of who we were striving to become.

Palmer (2012) reminds us that, "As you stand in the gap between reality and possibility, the temptation is to jump onto one side or the other" (Interview response, para. 6). When faced with tragic realities, we tend to avoid or resist them; the temptation is to either fall into a cynical, hopeless skepticism, or to "float around in a dream state" imagining idealistic solutions (Palmer, 2012, Interview response, para. 6). While these dichotomies—that Palmer (2012) refers to as "corrosive skepticism" and "irrelevant idealism"—seem like different approaches on the surface, they each lead to a similar outcome: they take us out of the action and limit our agency. It is much more challenging, yet much more impactful, to remain hopeful while creating new possibilities from within the tragic gap.

The "good intentions" teachers had set out to achieve, in some cases, reflected Palmer's (2012) notion of "irrelevant idealism." After their transition into stark new realities, the realization that social justice was not some picture-perfect thing that could be achieved simply through hard work led them to waver, at times, into the territory of a "corrosive cynicism" (e.g., "I don't know if I am cut out for this" "I'm becoming the teacher I don't even recognize," etc.)

(Lauren, Reflection, October 2014; Marissa, Interview, December 2014). Through sharing stories, our community of practice became aware of our collective tendency to waver between idealism and cynicism. We knew that in order to continue to do the important work with children that we were all passionate about, we would have to find the inner strength to stand within the tragic gap, where teaching for social justice actually takes place (Palmer, 1980, 2012). On our community calls, the teachers came to the realization that, as Mia would say, "our work as social justice educators [would] never be done" (Mia, Community Call, November, 2014). We began to see that, like transformation itself, social justice is not an end result (Ayers et al., 1998); it is something that we must always strive toward achieving, but that will never truly be attained. For, the moment we remain stagnant (i.e., removed from the action that takes place within the tragic gap), we are no longer doing our job as social justice educators.

The Tragic Gap as a Space for Transformation

As teachers, transformation starts with the personal relationships we cultivate with ourselves, our students, and their families. Every interaction we have, every relationship we build, every lesson we teach, has the power to either *perpetuate* or *disrupt* the disparities of injustice unfolding every day. Our experiences in the classroom and in conversation taught us that social justice is about making conscious choices that promote equity in all forms—choices that Christa argued "can only be made while remaining hopeful and present" (Christa, Interview, December 2014). In a letter Lauren wrote to herself at the end of the school year, she acknowledged that "Educating for social justice, as a practice, was so ingrained in my teacher education program. After teaching for a year, [I] now realize that teaching, itself, is a means of social justice" (Lauren, Reflection, June 2015). Thus, in order to fulfill on their intentions for

social justice, these teachers' narratives increasingly suggested that they needed to "stay healthy so [they] could be present and continue to do the hard work [they] set out to do" (Andrea, Community Call, January 2015).

Together, these teachers came to accept that the tensions they were each experiencing would never go away; in fact, due to the stressful working conditions, "the tensions would likely only escalate from here" (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015). Because of this, they collectively came to realize that their individual roles as teachers for social justice were "not about finding a perfect solution to the systemic problems" (Cynhia, Community Call, February 2015); for the structural inequities were far too large and complex for any individual to solve on her own. Instead, being a social justice educator became about "being willing to face each problem with ethical integrity as it surfaced" (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015)—despite conflict. On the individual level, it was about cultivating the courage within to "teach against the grain" for the betterment of those whose voices are currently silenced within the education system (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

> [I] have realized, that despite academic pushdown, institutional racism, lack of resources and support, that [I], single handedly, have the strength to change the world. It's a powerful realization. Before teaching in Honduras, [I] certainly did not carry the confidence nor the experience to truly put words into action. If [I] had not taken the time to deeply reflect upon each situation, [I] may not have known how or why [I] needed to fight in the first place. (Lauren, Reflection, June 2015)

For our community of practice, being a social justice educator started to include and depend upon these teachers' own agency and empowerment. It required standing up to

administrations despite conflict, and "giving voice to students who had no space to share their stories" (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014). These teachers came to realize, as Lauren's statement above suggests, that they would have to exercise their own agency in order to stay in the tragic gap and provide more equitable, empowering opportunities for their students (Souto-Manning, 2013).

However, as discussed previously, their declining physical, emotional, and mental well-being made it extremely challenging to sustain their inner strength and sense of agency. Unfortunately, their narratives revealed that most teachers "received little support in handling stress outside of our community of practice" (Cynhia, Interview, December 2014). In reflecting upon her own and her students' diminishing well-being, Marissa stated that "the interesting part about this is that what my students and I need are essentially the same: better working conditions" (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015). Yet, she knew that she could not rely on external support from her school administration and district leaders to change the working conditions for herself and her students; she would have to find another way.

> I need help in learning how to make this happen myself. I need help in learning how to accept that the students don't need to be constantly engaged in mentally rigorous activity, but maybe their bodies need some activity too... *I need to learn how to let go,* while still pulling my students even closer. (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015)

Marissa had come to terms with the fact that she would never be able to change the broken system alone. She was now ready to let go of the temptation of both "irrelevant idealism" and "corrosive cynicism" so she could truly play her part as a teacher for social justice (Palmer, 1980). However, if she was not going to use either of those coping mechanisms to handle the

stresses, she knew that she would need to find support from other sources. In our discussions with one another, and in light of the findings I shared previously, our community of practice realized that support for teacher well-being was extremely important, yet would likely not come from the top-down (i.e., administration, policy mandates, etc.) unless a significant paradigm shift were to occur. Marissa, like all eight of these teachers, felt compelled to take this conversation to the next level:

> We need the conversation about teaching and learning conditions in the United States to become a serious and popular one. I'm willing to continue working against the grain if I can see a light at the end of the tunnel. How can we get this started? (Marissa, Reflection, February 2015)

Little did Marissa realize at the time that she had already found the answer to this question. The conversation had already begun, and she was a part of creating it. Simply by participating in this collective dialogue and engaging in ongoing reflection, these eight teachers' stories about teaching and learning conditions in the United States were being documented, and would eventually be shared with the world as a catalyst for change.

Making the Connection: Social-Emotional and Academic Learning

> Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students learn to weave a world for themselves. (Palmer, 1998, p. 16)

Through a deeper understanding of the connections between our own well-being and our teaching, we started to believe that, in addition to more fully embodying and modeling our values as teachers for social justice, we could also improve students' academic performance by cultivating connectedness in and between every student and teacher. In our ongoing dialogue, we came to the realization that our education system's approach is backwards. We are always talking about how academic success is the key to leading a healthy and happy life; even discourses around "college and career readiness" reinforce the underlying message that if academics come first, happiness will follow (Conley, 2010). Yet, what these teachers' experiences and cutting-edge neuroscience research made us believe is that, actually, leading a healthy and happy life is critical to academic success, not just the other way around (Ekman & Davidson, 1994; Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009). If students are overstimulated, stressed, or unfocused during a math lesson, for example, research suggests that new information will go in one ear and out the other (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Weare, 2013). On the other hand, if students are calm and their well-being high, the likelihood of comprehension becomes exponentially greater (Jennings, 2009).

The same idea applies for teachers. If teachers' minds are spinning, hearts pounding, and anxiety levels rising while they are trying to teach a math skill, the children are also bound to experience stress and anxiety, and thus miss what could have been an engaging opportunity for deep learning. When Christa put herself in her students' shoes, she started to see the bigger picture:

> If you have a leader who is anxious, short fused, and tense then pretty soon you will feel that way as well. It takes a lot of work to stay relaxed in this profession and something

> that has helped me a lot over the past year is focusing on the big picture of education, children's lives, and teaching… [and then when I do that] guess what does become important? The children, their happiness, their emotional well-being, and most importantly the relationship you have with them. (Christa, Reflection, February 2015)

Christa's statement reminds us that teachers *want* to focus on what matters most: the students. Yet, as their stories in Chapter Five demonstrated, when they let their negative emotions (e.g., fear, shame, anger, self-doubt, etc.) overwhelm them, they tend to lose site of the bigger picture of education that Christa is talking about.

Students' well-being matters; yet, we cannot ignore that their well-being affects, and is affected by, teachers' well-being. It goes both ways. If teachers reduce their stress and spend more time taking care of their well-being, they can better care for and teach our children. By the same token, if students are learning strategies in school to help them regulate their bodies, focus their minds, and harness their inner strengths, academic performance is bound to improve (as studies on the use of mindfulness-based stress reduction practices in schools have demonstrated) (Frank et. al, 2013). But, as revealed by these teachers' stories, opportunities to learn these tools (for themselves and their students) were rare, or, in some cases, completely absent. This, however, did not stop some teachers, like Lauren, from trying to shift the status quo:

> I know that as a first year teacher, I am no expert. However, we receive NO professional development or community building opportunities outside of the first week of training here at Mayatan and I want to change that. I want to provide social justice-oriented strategies and materials for social emotional learning so that others who follow me can attempt to do the same for their colleagues. (Lauren, Reflection, November 2015)

As Lauren's intentions suggest, perhaps what was needed to change the cycles of reactivity described in the previous chapter was to equip teachers with the right tools both personally and professionally to help them maintain their ability to see the bigger picture in moments of struggle, so they could be more effective stewards of their own and their students' well-being.

A Holistic Perspective Begins to Emerge

Through collectively sharing stories, these teachers began to see that, as Elizabeth stated, "our individual experiences of stress, overwhelm, and exhaustion seem to be universally experienced by *all* teachers" (Elizabeth, Community Call, December 2014)—and that the only way to transform this issue would be to "start putting ourselves first" (Christa, Community Call, December 2014). They knew that social-emotional development was critical for their students (as revealed by their intentions in Chapter Four); however, what they discovered to be true over time was that "social-emotional development was equally as critical" for themselves, as teachers (Lauren, Interview, June 2015). Through telling and retelling their stories and noticing the emerging patterns, they began to see that in order to fulfill their intentions for teaching for social justice—and to continue transforming their previously held deficit perspectives—"[they] would have to start working smarter, not harder" (Marissa, Community Call, January 2015). They had to give to themselves and get support, so that they could give to and support their students.

While teacher education had helped these teachers become incredibly well-versed in social justice theories, it did not adequately provide them with tangible tools necessary to emotionally deal with the stresses they faced in their school communities. Across the board, their

schools and districts lacked the support structures these first year teachers were looking for to sustain their well-being. Linh stated:

> I think that the problem is that there is not an opportunity (presented by the districts or administrators) throughout the school year for teachers to address the fact that our well-being is not being taken care of. The district has teachers do professional development modules that have no relevancy to what our issues really are or what we are really struggling with at school. (Linh, Reflection, June 2015)

Like Linh, all the teachers reached points where they were hungry for emotional support and did not know where to turn. This was especially true for teachers, like Elizabeth, whose young students experienced poverty, violence, and other injustices outside of the classroom.

> I have had a murder, a child expelled from preschool, two house fires, a death of a colleague. And, I have had a student who is so traumatized he physically attacks me and other students. It is so so hard, and the only thing that will help is a support system in and outside school. (Elizabeth, Reflection, July 2015)

Similar to Elizabeth, I could tell through their storytelling that all eight teachers were longing for an answer for how to emotionally deal with the everyday stresses, but were seeking the answer outside themselves. Reacting in response to their fears left them "pointing fingers at individuals or the system" (Marissa, Interview, June 2015), rather than taking personal responsibility for their reactive behaviors and negative thoughts. While the act of blaming others (e.g., students, families, administration, the system, etc.) may have served as a temporary release for their frustrations, it seemed to be making them more reactive, "burnt out, and lost" (Lauren, Reflection, December 2015) and less conscious and responsive. These projections of their

frustrations onto others served to perpetuate, rather than disrupt, the emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges in their classrooms (Hawkins, 2013)—negatively impacting their teaching.

Research on the benefits of wellness practices like mindfulness and yoga made me believe that, in order to overcome their frustrations, what they really needed were spaces both in and outside of work to physically, mentally, and emotionally heal (Frewen et. al, 2008). Given the challenges these teachers faced, and the impact of those challenges on their well-being and teaching, it became apparent that they *did* need some form of external support; support that would help them cultivate their own inner strength and confidence. Determined to find a way to sustainably avoid both "irrelevant idealism" and "corrosive cynicism" (Palmer, 1980), our community of practice began to explore various *inner* sources of support that might help us courageously live and teach within the "tragic gap."

Cultivating Change: Inner Transformation

> We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves.
>
> —Dalai Lama XIV

This section explores how these new teachers "revised and reshaped the story of [their] lives" as we began working toward enhancing our own well-being as a means of transforming ourselves and our teaching (Capps & Ochs, 1995, p. 15). Once we realized that we needed to cultivate inner strength to avoid falling to one side or the other of the "tragic gap," we began to explore new ways to heal and empower ourselves and our students. By focusing on enhancing teacher (and thus student) well-being, as opposed to fixing bad behaviors or placing blame on external factors, deficit-based approaches to "behavior management" transformed into

opportunities for cultivating community in our classrooms and schools. Through exchanging stories with one another, these eight teachers came to the realization that they had the power to change their teaching through transforming their relationships with themselves.

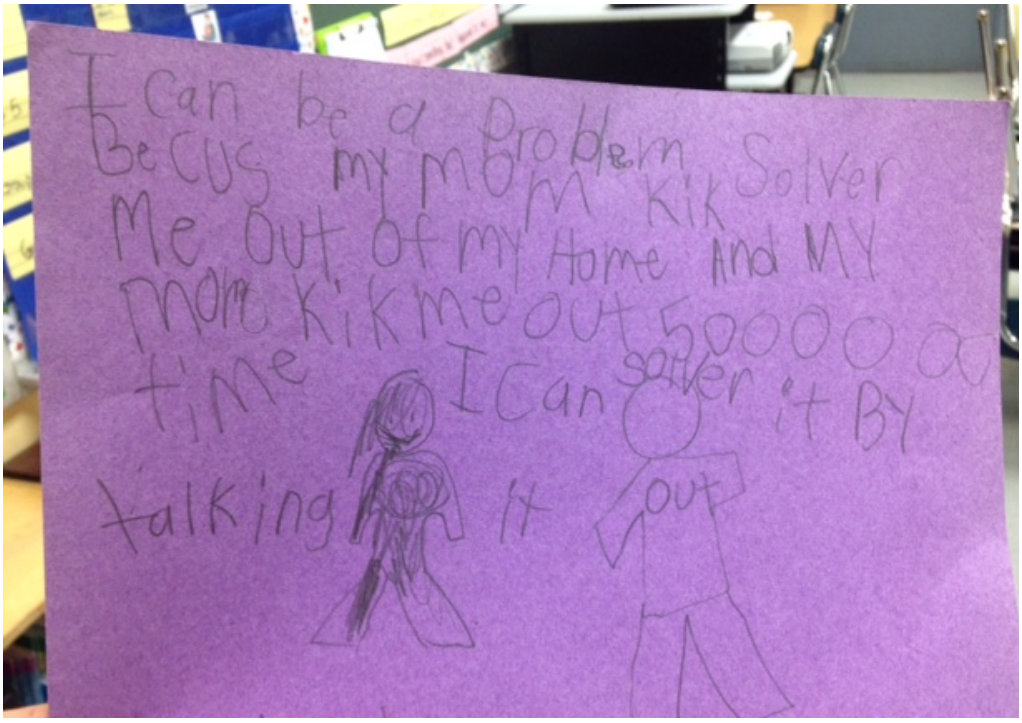
Finding Inner Peace within Outer Struggle

The Dalai Lama asserts that a calm mind brings inner strength and self-confidence, and is critical for good health (Lama, 2009). Groundbreaking research substantiates his claim; Davidson et al. (2013), who research the cognitive effects of mindfulness, have found that changing the mind can change the brain, and can alter one's experience of a particular situation regardless of external circumstances. According to Davidson (2013), "The key to a healthy life is having a healthy mind," which, he argues, can be cultivated through a practice of mindfulness, or "moment to moment non-judgemental attention and awareness" (as cited in Bass, 2013, p. 51). Through my inquiry into well-being, I came to realize that individuals do have agency in determining and cultivating their own well-being—and that teachers *can* learn to be physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy, regardless of the stressful situations they face at work. As Davidson (2014) reminds us, "well-being can be learned. It's analogous to skills training: it is through repeated practice that connections get established in the brain that support the new skill or habit" (Davidson, Lecture, March 2014).

As Chapter Two explored, research conducted by Davidson and others shows that wellness practices like yoga and mindfulness reduce stress and anxiety, improve well-being and attentiveness, and increase executive functioning and confidence—all outcomes that we want to see in both our students and our teachers (Flook et. al, 2010). Even the limited research on yoga and mindfulness that has been conducted in schools demonstrates significant positive effects on

student performance (e.g., 15% increases in math standardized test scores in elementary school students) as well as improvements in classroom community and student engagement (Oaklander, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The deep conversations I continued to engage in with each teacher began to reflect our understanding of the impact of our own well-being on our teaching, as did those we collectively had on our community calls (which, as Mia said, "I appreciated so much because we each got to vulnerably share our highs and lows and then dig deeper into our personal stories") (Mia, Interview, June 2015). One such conversation in December, which revolved around a photograph Marissa shared of one of her students' responses to a math problem, ended up shifting into a discussion of how we could enable ourselves and our students to show up more wholly:



[Marissa]: this is my most amazing, kind, compassionate student…(read words and described picture)...

[Mia]: How did you respond?

[Marissa]: We only had a chance to talk about it briefly before we got interrupted...

[Elizabeth]: How did reading his words make you feel?

[Marissa]: I just want to start paying more attention to all of my students, and for Bradley to know that I love him. I want to try implementing things that will support him in continuing to open up like this. And my other students too...

[Cynhia]: Like what? Weren't you just talking about how you have way more things you're trying to fit in than you have time for?

[Lauren]: I feel you, Cynhia, but it seems like this is one of those things that just has to take priority...

[Ilana]: What if you try one of the loving-kindness meditations you've been telling us you wanted to try in your own morning routine? What about adding something like that into your morning circle?

[Marissa]: Yeah… I suppose I could. I'm a little concerned about what the other teachers or parents would think…

[Lauren]: Oh my...! I was so worried about what others thought too. But, remember when I brought my idea to do PDs on these kinds of practices to the school director? She actually loved it… and so did the staff. You'll never know until you try!

Conversations like these began to inspire the eight teachers to put more wellness practices into action. Yet, except for Christa, who was a certified kids yoga instructor, most of these teachers had little to no training in wellness practices, and thus, did not have tangible strategies to support themselves and their students in coping with high-stress situations. On top

of this, because they were constantly grappling with how to continue to better support their students, their anxiety often made them resistant to taking the time to care for themselves. For, they often held onto the idea that taking moments to step back, reflect, and breathe was, as Christa would say "selfish," or as Marissa and Lauren would say, "seemingly impossible" (Reflections, October, 2014). It was not until, as a group, we deconstructed our stories and saw how our lack of well-being was negatively impacting our teaching that we became motivated, for the students' sake, to break the cycle and actually prioritize self-care.

Determined to each find their own path to cultivating well-being, Cynhia and Andrea signed up for their first yoga class and quickly became regulars; Christa and Elizabeth, who had been yoga enthusiasts for years, finally started reprioritizing their practice. Lauren and Mia decided to begin each morning with a simple breathing exercise to clear their minds before the hectic school day. Marissa and Linh finally went back to the gym, recognizing that the 30 minutes of sweating out the stress was worth far more than what they could have accomplished at school in that time. While they experienced the benefits of these practices even after just a few sessions of self-care (breathing, yoga, meditating, running, reading, etc.), they struggled to maintain a disciplined daily practice within a profession that demanded so much of their time, energy, and attention. Although their commitments to self-care wavered due to the inevitable stresses first year teachers face, their newfound awareness of the intimate relationship between their self transformations and their students' transformations made the "time spent taking care of [themselves] worth the while" (Linh, Interview, June, 2015).

Prioritizing Self-Care In and Outside the Classroom

> Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch.
>
> —Parker Palmer, 1999, p.30

Social-emotional health, these teachers found, was the foundation for both student learning and effective teaching. Christa put it simply: "When my students and I are healthy and happy, learning happens; but when any of us come to class unhappy, or our basic needs are not met, learning seems almost impossible" (Christa, Reflection, January 2015). Driven by this understanding, these teachers worked together to brainstorm and develop creative new ways to infuse social-emotional practices into their teaching. Increasingly, they started prioritizing time in their personal and professional schedules to both *practice* and *teach* self-care, and as a result, experienced significant improvements in well-being and in their classroom learning environments.

Lauren and Marissa, for example, began introducing breathing techniques into their morning community circles and during transitions with their first graders. Others started using the stress reduction strategies they had learned outside of school in their classrooms to help both them and their students deal responsibly with challenges as they arose. Christa, after her emotional midyear breakdown, started embodying the qualities she had hoped to instill in her students by modeling techniques she was using to help reduce her own anxiety. When she felt her anxiety levels rising in the midst of a chaotic, noisy circle time, for example, rather than reacting to the children with frustration, she would intentionally "close [her] eyes, go inward,

and start deep breathing" (Christa, Reflection, February 2015). Within moments, her intuitive students felt the shift, and joined her silently in breath, with their eyes closed.

Beyond integrating these techniques in the classroom, the teachers also realized the critical need to take moments for themselves outside the classroom to step back, breathe, and recharge. Christa started to take five minutes during the school day to "just sit down and meditate when the kids weren't there" (Christa, Interview, June 2015). According to Christa, "having that tool [of meditation] to re-collect" during moments of stress made it easier for her to "not hold on to what just happened. Letting [an issue] go gave me the strength to start fresh with that child," she explained (Christa, Interview, June 2015). "Relating to [a situation] as a new time period rather than waiting a whole day to start fresh" enabled her to be more present and available for her students, which ultimately helped them become more present and available for learning, and for each other. "When I value and respect how they feel, I am teaching them to value and respect how others feel," she declared (Christa, Interview, June 2015).

Lauren, like most teachers, found that "When I do not exercise, my patience in the classroom dwindles" (Lauren, Reflection, January 2015). This clear connection between personal health and professional performance pushed her to take responsibility for transforming her lifestyle in order to transform her teaching: "For my own mental health and for the health and well-being of our classroom, Miss Lauren has to get her body moving!" (Lauren, Reflection, January 2015). Her realization, in addition to our ongoing conversations about self-care, inspired her to creatively integrate a wide range of wellness techniques into her first grade classroom—some of which she had previously learned, and others of which she created on her own.

> They just get really, really excited, and giving them a space, even if it's just three minutes of breathing gets them back inside themselves… It's like I am back in my body [and my environment]. I'm in control of my body. We had to have those spaces. And I think it really helped pull them in. (Lauren, Interview, June 2015)

As revealed in their narratives, the more breathing, movement, and mind-body techniques they incorporated into their daily instruction, the more engaged their students became, and the more confident they felt about their practice—for the positive outcomes in student engagement and academic performance spoke for themselves. Because of their busy schedules (which in some cases led to resistance), some of the teachers would go weeks without integrating these types of practices into their classrooms and lives. However, our regular community calls and reflections provided a much-needed structure to hold themselves and one another accountable to resuming their wellness practices in order to fulfill on their intentions.

Whether they were integrated every day or only sporadically, the teachers found that implementing mind-body practices into the classroom was particularly helpful during "high-intensity transitions like either from recess or from gym or some special" (Lauren, Interview, June 2015). Lauren realized the extent to which these practices helped focus and pull her students in when she no longer had to be the one recommending their use:

> They started doing it on their own, or telling someone else to do it. Or if I came over and just said: "this group is way, way too active right now, what can we do?" They would recommend that "maybe we should take some breaths" or "go do some arm holds." (Lauren, Interview, June 2015)

It was clear that the integration of these practices, at first, required facilitation of the teacher; but, as Lauren's story above suggested, with practice, students eventually learned to regulate their bodies and emotions on their own. While Lauren infused these strategies across her curriculum, Elizabeth and her students "took a lot of deep breaths together, especially after something big happened" (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015). After one of Elizabeth's students climbed on top of another boy and physically choked him, for example, she said, "it was a big deal for everybody, so we all sat down and took some deep breaths" (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015). Although she did not incorporate as much yoga and movement into her everyday instruction as Lauren and Christa did, Elizabeth realized its benefits and acknowledged that "using yoga more, specifically in my classroom, is definitely a goal I have for the coming years" (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015).

Fostering Community through Social-Emotional Teaching and Learning

No matter *how* teachers integrated these practices into their classrooms and lives, they all found that the simple act of creating the space for themselves and their students to clear their minds through breath benefitted everyone. Their students became better prepared to regulate their bodies and focus their minds during learning time, which reinforced these teachers' collective belief that the "whole social, emotional piece needs to come first before anything else can happen in terms of academics" (Lauren, Interview, June 2015).

Despite increasing cultural and curricular barriers, the teachers progressively gained confidence in making choices that aligned with their social justice-oriented values. For Lauren, in order to stay true to her pedagogical philosophy within the context of a school where, in her words, "developmentally inappropriate, culturally insensitive, and borderline inhumane teaching

practices" (Lauren, Reflection, November 2014) were the norm, she must directly "teach against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991). But, this challenge did not stop her:

> We move and groove all the time. Singing, dancing, and all together goofiness are not only encouraged, but required as part of participation in my classroom. Music and movement opportunities are provided in my classroom between all areas of academia. (Lauren, Reflection, February 2015)

Interestingly, the positive energy exuding from Lauren's classroom eventually inspired even the greatest skeptics of her staff to come around to the idea of using social-emotional and culturally responsive techniques in their classrooms and lives. This was witnessed by the fact that Lauren began facilitating professional development workshops to further expose her colleagues to community-based, social justice-oriented pedagogical strategies—fulfilling the equity-oriented intentions she had set at the beginning of the year.

For all these teachers, community building was at the heart of teaching for social justice. Christa empowered her students to take responsibility for their individual transformations through what she referred to as "hope centerings" (Christa, Interview, December 2014). In this activity, her first graders each shared what they hoped to learn and accomplish during the school year, and then collectively created a system of accountability that would support them in "achieving their hopes and dreams" (Christa, Interview, December 2014). "They came up with all sorts of rules," she remembered (Christa, Interview, December 2014), which helped them hold themselves, each other, and the entire classroom community accountable for their learning (Souto-Manning, 2013). Collectively, all eight teachers came to firmly believe that integrating these types of community building and social-emotional practices into their daily routines with

students "had a big impact on their academics" (Mia, Interview, July 2015). By the end of the year, Christa could finally articulate why:

> They just know what's next, and they know how to do routines. They know how to solve problems on their own. They know how to work together without me. It's given me the opportunity to get to so many more small groups and get to so many more academic pieces because they can solve problems without me. I had to go slow in order to go fast. (Christa, Interview, June 2015)

Across the board, these teachers developed the perspective that teaching for social justice was not about working harder and faster; it was about working smarter and slower. In their reflections in the second half of the year, these teachers shared that intentionally slowing down enabled them to create the space for their students to breathe, and for themselves to reflect on and appreciate what *was* working, rather than react to what *was not* working. It helped them learn to quiet their rapidly moving minds and return back to the present, even during the most chaotic of moments. Through shared storytelling, they came to realize that, although our thoughts, as Ladson-Billings (1995) found, *are* usually the source of the problems in education, if transformed, they also have the power to cultivate positive change. For, as Norman Vincent Peale reminds us, "change your thoughts and you change your world" (as cited in Akpoveta, 2014, p. 48).

The more these teachers took responsibility for their own emotional well-being in the classroom, the more they saw their students doing the same. However, this did not happen immediately for all of them. In fact, some teachers did not realize the extent to which their students had internalized the social-emotional practices they had taught until they were ready to

give up on using them altogether—for, from Marissa's perspective, "nothing seemed to be working, so why not resort back to yelling like everyone else is doing?" (Marissa, Interview, December 2014).

Yet, no matter how unclear it was whether or not students were picking something up in the moment, they always seemed to "surprise [their teachers] down the road" (Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015). Witnessing their most challenging students intentionally use the mindful coping techniques to regulate their bodies, focus their minds, or solve problems with other students, made all the time they had spent trying to help children develop social-emotional skills worth the while: "And that's just it. Your heart is filled. Your soul is renewed" (Lauren, Reflection, September 2014).

Well-Being "*Is* about Social Justice"

By the end of the year, these teachers and I all felt strongly that cultivating well-being in and outside of the classroom "*is* about social justice" (Elizabeth, Reflection, July 2015), though our understandings of how and why well-being and social justice are related had evolved significantly throughout our journey.

> Yoga and meditation in my classroom isn't just about providing a socioeconomically constrained population with something they may not have previously had access to, which is actually exactly how I saw it before. These routines are about slowly moving away from telling our teachers and students that classrooms need to feel as structured as prisons, and towards the idea that even our youngest students are capable of self regulation and executive functioning, given that their teacher has the proper tools and care to create this environment. (Marissa, Reflection, August, 2015)

Over time, these teachers came to utilize wellness practices in their pedagogy as a way to push back against the top-down structures in education that are currently setting some children up for success and leaving others behind to fail (Valencia, 1997). For, Ayers et al. (1998) reminds us that "teaching for social justice is teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full identity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move against those obstacles" (p.xvii). These teachers came to find that wellness practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and community building fostered the type of teaching Ayers et al. (1998) considered to be socially just. The integration of these practices (which they drew from their own self-care practices and increasingly shared with one another on our community calls) into the classroom invited students to acknowledge "the whole of who [they were]" (Palmer, 1998, p.13) by deepening their ability to focus their minds, regulate their emotions, and remain peaceful during stressful situations. Furthermore, as the examples above revealed, when facilitated during community circles, instruction, or even in the midst of transition, these wellness pedagogies opened up a safe space for each student to express their wholeness within the classroom community—empowering them to build deeper relationships and to overcome barriers to their growth and development.

Hearing these teachers share their stories of the tangible outcomes they were experiencing through integrating wellness and self-care practices into their lives and classrooms made me realize that cultivating well-being is not only related to teaching for social justice; it is critical to fostering social justice. Ayers et al. (1998) remind us that the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is: "You can *change* the world" (p. xvii), and as Marissa shares, "even if a teacher never directly integrates breathing or movement practices into her classroom,

the tools she carries with her are powerful agents of social change" (Marissa, Reflection, September 2015).

Recognizing the Potential for Worldwide Change

> Be the change you wish to see in the world.
>
> —Mahatma Gandhi

This chapter tells the story of how our community of practice collectively committed to enhancing our own well-being, and transformed our teaching by doing so. I began by drawing upon Palmer's (1980) notion of the "tragic gap" between idealism and cynicism to illustrate how their identities and perspectives evolved as these eight teachers settled into the reality of teaching for social justice in today's education system. Next, I explained how our community of practice explored the connection between social-emotional and academic teaching and learning, and concluded that we would need to enhance our own and our students' well-being in order to transform our external circumstances. I then described how these teachers began integrating self-care and wellness practices into their classrooms and lives—which resulted in transformations of self, of teaching, and of society (Souto-Manning, 2013). I concluded by sharing how our collective efforts, and the results they generated, strengthened our understanding of the connection between well-being and social justice.

Seeing My Story in Theirs

Little did I know when I first decided to follow these eight teachers for my dissertation that they would end up experiencing similar personal and collective transformations that I had experienced in my own pre-k classroom through practicing yoga, mindfulness and community

building. But they did. I had no idea when I first started this project that I would eventually come to see a part of my story of teaching in each of theirs—and that as a collective unit, each of our stories of teaching would reveal insights that none of us could have discovered on our own. For, it was through the sharing of our experiences together that we were able to see the systemic problem of teacher stress surface before our eyes; and with the support of our community, we were able to address this issue head on. Sharing our individual stories of attempting to teach for social justice—and, often falling short of our intentions—manifested into groundbreaking conversations, which eventually culminated in a project far bigger than any of us imagined before embarking on this journey together.

Seeing the World's Story in Our Own

After living alongside these teachers for just a few short months, we all felt inspired to *do something*. For, there was no more time to waste. Already, one third of teachers were leaving the classroom within the first three years, with 50% gone by year five (Ingersoll, 2003; Lambert, 2006)—and realistically, if we did not start paying attention to, and prioritizing, teacher well-being now, these shocking percentages would only continue to grow. Even these eight teachers, who were trained in a top teacher education program and who entered the field thinking they would "be in it for the long haul," (Elizabeth, Interview, December 2014) began to question whether or not they could emotionally handle feeling overworked, undervalued, and overwhelmed for the rest of their careers. Their powerful stories collectively revealed that we have a real problem that is not being addressed within our academically-driven education system: our teachers need emotional support in order to emotionally (and ultimately, academically) support our students. And unless they are given the tools and space to take care of

themselves—especially those teaching in high-stress, and in many cases, traumatic environments—teachers will have a very difficult time holding space for their students to be fully engaged, supported, and happy in school.

The community calls and reflections these teachers participated in throughout the course of this project became the very space of support and transformation they were so desperately seeking within a system that did not prioritize their well-being. Throughout the year, our community provided an opportunity for them not only to vent, but also to problem solve; to give and receive support and advice, and to create innovative new approaches to teaching for social justice. Stories of success were shared, ideas exchanged, and new strategies developed and implemented. Their individual stories continually inspired the group to push beyond its limits. For some teachers, these conversations even motivated them to cultivate similar spaces for their colleagues to engage in critical dialogue, and collectively address the issues facing their entire school communities.

Over time, their experiences of personal transformation in the areas self-worth, self-confidence, and self-care created ripple effects that permeated beyond just the walls of their classrooms. Their personal stories of transformation inspired collective transformations, which in turn, reinvigorated them to keep pushing the boundaries both within and across their school communities. As they transformed, their teaching transformed, which in turn, transformed their worlds. And as their worlds transformed, they, too, changed. Together, we started to see that Souto-Manning' s (2013) three layers of transformation—of self, of teaching, and of society—are interrelated and ever-evolving, and that by starting with the self we could

profoundly influence all three. In the process, we laid the foundation for a movement that would seek to spread these transformations throughout the entire education system.

Chapter Seven

Breathe For Change: Changing the World, One Teacher at a Time

In Chapter Four, we saw a group of eight first year teachers come together with a common purpose: to hold themselves and each other accountable for fulfilling on their intentions to teach for social justice. We then witnessed the complex tensions that arose during their transition into the classroom as these teachers' good intentions came into conflict with the stark realities of teaching in diverse, under-resourced school communities. Chapter Five went on to reveal how these tensions led to a decrease in the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of these eight teachers, and illuminated the ways in which their diminishing well-being directly impacted their pedagogy and their interactions with students and members of their school communities. In Chapter Six, we witnessed how our community of practice became inspired to find and implement new ways to support one another in cultivating inner strength and peace despite external challenges—resulting in transformational enhancements in both teaching and learning.

This concluding chapter contextualizes these findings within the education system at large, providing a foundation for understanding how teacher well-being (or lack thereof) is universally impacting teaching across diverse educational environments. Building upon this foundation, this chapter reveals the potential for societal transformation that exists if we, as stakeholders in education, take action to care for our teachers so they can care for our students. Finally, the chapter goes on to tell the story of how this project inspired the birth of an organization called Breathe For Change, which aims to improve the health and well-being of teachers, students and school communities across the globe. It concludes by describing how this movement has already begun to create the collective evolution needed to manifest an education system that lives up to its promises.

Our Experiences: A Microcosm of Education at Large

> As educators who strive to teach both for and through social justice, our individual and collective stories show not only the struggles that exist within our elementary classrooms, but the constant battle we fight to confront and diminish such issues. These challenges, whether they be of poverty, hunger, class, race, gender, sexual identity, politics, what have you, all affect the social, emotional and academic well-being of students, as well as educators.
>
> —Lauren, Reflection, July 2015

Endemic Inequities in Education

The inequities impacting our students are evident. Over 16 million, or 22%, of all children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, and a total of 45% of students in schools are considered low-income (National Center For Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2013). Consistently, research has shown that poverty can stifle children's learning, increase mental and physical health issues, and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems in the classroom (NCCP, 2013). As would be expected, students who live in poverty are more likely to struggle academically in school. Unfortunately, the number of students experiencing poverty is on the rise, which may partially explain why achievement levels and international academic rankings have declined for the United States over the past few decades.

According to recent reports by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), by eighth grade, already two-thirds of all students in our country score below proficient in both reading and math, and 75% cannot write at grade-level (as cited in The Broad Foundation, 2015).

By twelfth grade, these numbers are worse, and 1.1 million students end up dropping out of school every year (EPE, 2012). Unfortunately, dropout rates are disproportionately higher among African-American and Hispanic students, at 40%, in comparison to the national average of 27% (EPE, 2012). Students are also facing increasing social-emotional challenges in and outside of schools, as demonstrated by the fact that currently 5.1 million students in the U.S. (1 out of every 11 children) have been diagnosed with ADHD (Pastor et al., 2015). Risks associated with societal issues and mental health are magnified for children who experience poverty in their early years, which explains why teachers of young children—like the eight in this study—constantly find themselves grappling with questions like, "How can I support my students in beating the odds?" "What can I do *now* to ensure that my students do not become another one of these statistics *later*?"

Research has proven the disparities, and the experiences of millions of students across the country and world serve as living examples of these systemic problems. But, as this dissertation has illuminated, how these inequities physically, mentally, and emotionally impact our teachers is a critical conversation often absent from educational discourses. I argue that this conversation must be brought to the forefront of education if we, as a nation, truly care about actualizing America's promise to provide a high quality education for all. In order to ensure that "[we] do not [end up settling] for an America where some kids don't have a chance [to attain a high quality education]" (Obama, Inaugural Address, 2009), we need to better support those who are working tirelessly to transform students' trajectories. For, just like our students, our teachers' well-being matters, too. Teachers need balance. They need support. They need the space to let go of all the anxiety, all the stress, and all the pressure that they inevitably face working within such

difficult conditions. They need to learn to let go so that they can be balanced, supportive, and present for their students (many of whom, as research shows, do not have balance, support or safety outside of school) (Delpit, 2006).

Teacher Burnout: A Universal Phenomenon

My journey living alongside these teachers revealed that the most prominent problem they collectively faced was their inability to manage their own and their students' stress and overwhelm. Linh's conversations with older, experienced staff and security at her school illuminated the extent to which this issue of teacher stress and burnout extends far beyond the scope of these eight teachers' lived experiences. Through reflecting on her ongoing discussions with teachers in and outside her school, she discovered that:

> There seems to be a change in how educators are viewed in our modern society. In general, it seems like teachers feel less respected and recognized for their efforts and expertise in working with children by the community, families, and administration that they work for. I've been told that more teachers in the district are simply walking away from their jobs because their well-being is not being addressed and taken care of. (Linh, Reflection, July 2015)

Whether or not the teachers *should* feel this way (e.g., less respected, burnt out, unrecognized) is up to interpretation. However, the fact that *they do* feel this way cannot be ignored, especially in a country where teacher education program enrollment rates are declining (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), teacher recruitment efforts are failing (Zeichner, 2003), and teacher retention rates are dropping at astonishing rates, with close to half of all teachers

leaving within the first five years, and over one-third of all teachers within the first three (Lambert, 2006).

We have to start paying more attention to those working within this "high stress profession" because these trends are only getting worse (Huebner, Gilligan & Cobb, 2002). 73% of the 30,000 teachers who took a Quality of Worklife Survey in 2015 reported that they are often physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of the work day (American Federation of Teachers, 2015). In another survey conducted by Metlife, 51% of teachers reported feeling under great stress several days a week (Metlife, 2012). These numbers, while astonishing, make sense considering the fact that teachers in the United States spend an average of 1,097 hours teaching in a classroom each year in comparison to the global average of 786 hours (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). Teacher burnout rates are increasing across the board, and disproportionately affect high-poverty schools, with about 20% of all teachers in these schools leaving the profession each year. These percentages are even more staggering among new teachers (National Public Radio, 2014); the annual attrition rate for first year teachers has risen 40% over the past two decades (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). This makes sense, considering the fact that there are few programs to emotionally support new teachers, as Cynhia's comment to me illuminates:

> Before you approached me, I actually looked to see if there were any programs out there for credentialed teachers who are in their first few years of teaching and who want to apply to be part of a reflective community like this… like where we could meet and support each other emotionally. But there's nothing like that that exists so I was like, oh, wouldn't that be nice? (Cynhia, Interview, July 2015)

The problem is clear: teachers are stressed, overwhelmed, and undervalued, which has significant implications on themselves, their students, and society. These issues have major financial ramifications as well; districts spend over $2.2 billion is spent each year on teacher turnover (Phillips, 2015). Yet, what is being done to address this problem?

Teacher Stress: Overlooked and Under-Prioritized

> I think that from all of our experiences, there seem to be a commonality—being a teacher is an incredibly stressful, challenging job no matter where you are and who you teach and work with… When our needs and challenges as educators are not being addressed by those we work for, it makes it increasingly difficult to maintain the passion we had going into this profession in the first place.
>
> —Linh, Reflection, July 2015

According to national surveys, working conditions for teachers are becoming increasingly more stressful (Kyriacou, 2001); yet, despite this trend, my research revealed that schools and districts are not adequately supporting teachers with tools to relieve stress and enhance their mental and emotional well-being. Lauren's reflection below suggests that there is some talk, but little action being done to address teacher stress at both the school and systemic level.

> Teacher well-being is addressed in the sense that we are told, "Make sure you take care of yourself." "Take time for you." And "You can't pour from an empty cup." But we are given no specific avenues as to *how* to take care of ourselves as educators. In addition, it is well known that teachers work far beyond contract hours every day. On average, I work 55 hours a week, sometimes more, but am contracted only 40 of those hours.

> Teachers are not allowed the space or time within their busy schedules to prioritize their own physical, mental and emotional well-being, and thus, must often choose between putting themselves first or finishing the never-ending prep and planning that exists in the elementary classroom! (Lauren, Reflection, July 2015).

School districts, one of the nation's largest employers, employing 6.7 million adults who affect the academic performance and well-being of close to 55 million students every day, are placing increasing demands on teachers without paying attention to or prioritizing employee well-being (Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2015). This made me wonder what other employers were doing to address stress in their workplaces. According to the Directors of Health Promotion and Education (2015), few school systems have wellness programs to support their employees, in comparison to other progressive businesses and industries who are increasingly implementing wellness programs to maintain the health and productivity of their workers (these programs have been associated with a 36% decrease in worker stress levels) (Headspace, 2015). These insights led me to another question: How can our education system learn from what other industries *are* doing and take a more active approach to improving teacher (and student) well-being on a systemic level? And how can we draw on these eight teachers' experiences to help inform a possible solution?

The Potential for Systemic Transformation

My experiences practicing self-care and sharing these techniques with hundreds of students and teachers—including these eight—has led me to believe that teaching educators how to cultivate well-being for themselves and their students could open up new possibilities for overcoming the endemic inequities discussed at the beginning of this section. Ironically, those

teaching and learning in under-resourced "high need" areas, who tend to face the highest levels of stress, are the least likely to have access to these wellness practices (Durlak et al., 2011). This tragic reality only further perpetuates the socioeconomic and cultural disparities in our education system that our country claims to be attempting to disrupt (Obama, Inaugural Speech, 2009).

The eight teachers and I all felt strongly that this disheartening trend needed to be broken. For, if we do not change the status quo, disproportionate numbers of teachers will continue to leave (especially those teaching in high poverty, under-resourced schools), not necessarily because they *want* to leave their students, but perhaps because they do not have the support structures in place to maintain their well-being and help their students do the same. If we give teachers the tools to calm their minds and maintain inner strength within challenging external circumstances, then they can share these practices with students, families, administrators, and so on. Entire school communities have the potential to transform. Lauren said it best: "As teachers and students gain these skills and understandings, our schools and communities will grow to become peaceful, safe, and successful" (Lauren, Reflection, August 2015).

Witnessing the deep-rooted systemic injustices through my own experiences as a teacher, researcher, and teacher educator made me confident that we could not depend on an external change in conditions to change our internal conditions. As our community discussed these experiences, we decided to practice what we preach about teacher empowerment by taking matters into our own hands.

My Newly Inspired Purpose

> I hope that our stories will help teachers feel that they are not alone, propel them to be confident and seek change and reform, and be able to ask for things that they need and articulate why. I believe that the more communities we build and spaces we have for teachers to talk about these needs, then it trickles up too. I think... people will realize that it's not just a select few teachers that are feeling isolated and undervalued.
>
> —Cynhia, Interview, June 2015

The individual and collective narratives revealed in this dissertation project led me to a course of action very different than what I had originally envisioned. I initially set out to explore how teachers translated their visions into action in the classroom. However, through the process of attempting to answer my original research questions, staggering evidence revealed that a lack of teacher well-being was often the underlying *reason* they were unable to fulfill their own visions for social justice—which took my dissertation in a new direction.

The Critical Voices of Teachers

When I started to analyze these teachers' stories, I began to feel like it was more important to highlight the narratives that illuminated the impact of their stress on their teaching than to deconstruct the specific ways in which they were falling short of fulfilling their intentions. Yes, in some cases these teachers exhibited characteristics of a savior complex or deficit thinking that scholars have found to be prevalent, especially among white, middle class teachers in our education system (Banks, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McIntosh, 1992) (e.g., "It's their fault I'm not…," "I started to blame them," "They need *my* help," "Those teachers treats students inappropriately," "If only their parents weren't so overbearing," etc.) (Marissa,

Elizabeth, Lauren & Mia, Reflections, 2014-2015). And yes, as many scholars have done before, I could have chosen to analyze these teachers' narratives from a critical lens in order to expose the ways their limited perspectives inhibited their ability to effectively teach for social justice.

But, what I found particularly interesting that had not yet surfaced in educational discourses was that the decline in these eight teachers' physical, mental, and emotional well-being seemed to exacerbate their reactive behaviors and be a limit their ability to effectively translate their visions for social justice into action. The more stress teachers were under, the more they reverted back to these types of reactive habits of mind (Murrell et al., 2010), and the less they demonstrated the reflexive awareness Garmon (2005) reminds us is key to expanding critical consciousness. On the other hand, when they prioritized their well-being and created more spaces in their daily lives for reflection and self-care, their ability to become self-aware and actualize their visions for social justice increased. This emerging pattern led me to my main argument of this dissertation: *Teacher well-being is essential to effective teaching, and in order to transform inequities in classrooms, schools, and communities, we must support teachers in taking care of themselves.*

Graduate school taught me to be critical; yet, what I came to see through this journey is that my role as a critical scholar is not solely to critique teachers on what they experience. It is to give them a safe space to share their honest experiences so that their needs can be realized, and can spark change within a standardized educational and political system that, according to many scholars, currently does not prioritize teacher voices (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 20111; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). So often as educational researchers, we try to remove ourselves from the situation by passively observing it as outsiders (Crotty, 1998). We deconstruct situations that

already exist by pointing to problems in teachers and in society—which is so similar to the ways in which disheartened teachers point to problems in their students and families, especially when stress levels are high. Yet, this attempt to remove ourselves from the situation is impossible, since as educational researchers and teacher educators, we are the ones developing the curriculum and impacting the structures within which teachers operate.

As a subjective scholar, I knew that, rather than try to eliminate or distance myself from the research (which is really blinding myself to the *truth* that I am already part of it), I must take responsibility for my involvement and engage in it consciously with purpose. In light of this, I decided to use what I had learned from my experience living alongside these teachers to create a solution that would not just reflect teachers voices, but would also meet teachers *where they are,* rather than where *we wish they would be*—just like we teach teachers to do with their students.

An Emerging Theory of Action

As I continued to reflect back on the narratives we each shared along our journey together, I realized that the stories that would drive this solution had already been documented, and that this dissertation would one day serve as the foundation for a tale far bigger than we had imagined. Noticing the trends in their collective struggles and transformations, I began to intentionally create more space for our community to share wellness practices we had integrated into our classrooms and lives with one another on our calls. By inviting them to engage in discussions about how these types of holistic pedagogies could be adapted for broader use, I hoped to co-construct ideas for how we could take what we had learned from our experiences together and put it into action. This process of envisioning a larger impact through our collective

narrative only increased the passion we all felt for the work we were doing, and inspired the us to invite other educators we knew into our community to participate in the larger conversation.

Starting in January, teachers who were connected to our group from across the world started to join our community; sometimes, we ended up spending multiple evenings a week on phone or video calls discussing our ideas. On these community calls, and in our one-on-one and small group conversations, the teachers openly expressed their thoughts about the significance of what we were doing, and teased out the components that were contributing to their growth:

> [Christa]: "This is so helpful, I wish all teachers could have this."
>
> [Elizabeth]: "I know, maybe we can figure out the pieces of it so others can use them too."
>
> [Cynhia]: "Well, we've been intentional and reflecting a lot."
>
> [Marissa]: "For me, the community connections have been *everything.*"
>
> [Lauren]: "Even spending once or twice a week at the beginning of the year… and then eventually everyday… focusing on reflection and self-care has literally changed my life, and my teaching."
>
> [Mia] "And I even noticed that my students picked up on it when I was more present. "
>
> [Christa] "It's amazing, right? Even my principal has commented on how many less behavioral issues we've had in my class… and [our superintendent] tweeted about me practicing yoga with my students on Twitter - I can't believe it!"
>
> [Ilana]: "I can. Teachers need this. Students need this. Our principals need this. We all need to take more time to breathe… "

[Marissa] Christa, I'm so happy your principal and superintendent realize the value… unlike you, I did not have the courage to keep my doors open [when I used these practices] because I was too nervous that I would get in trouble for taking one minute away from our mandated "academic time."

[Lauren]: Marissa, I felt the same way you did at first, too… I was totally scared… but then, I approached my school leader to see what she thought about me facilitating a professional development about the community building and social-emotional practices we learned in teacher ed and in this group.

[Linh] How did she react?

[Lauren] She was SO excited… and I was like, huh!? And now that I'm doing it, the staff keeps asking for more… when I peek my head in their classrooms, I even see them using the techniques!

[Elizabeth] After hearing all of your stories, I really want to get more training in yoga and mindfulness, for myself and my students...

This conversation is one example of the hundreds of unstructured, collaborative conversations we had over the course of the year that helped me discover both the challenges teachers were facing as well as potential solutions to help address their unfulfilled needs. Over time, the ideas shared during these discussions eventually evolved into a theory of action based on five components that significantly contributed to both our personal and collective transformations. These components include: intention and reflection, community building, wellness practices for teachers, holistic pedagogical practices, and systemic teacher support. The following five sections highlight the key takeaways from my dissertation research that I believe

have the potential to create a more socially just world for teachers, students, and entire school communities.

Intention and Reflection. The first component of this theory of action centers on intention and reflection. I posit that, in order for teachers to be able to effectively teach for social justice, they need to have opportunities to go on a journey inward. Through intention setting and reflection, the eight teachers in this study expanded their perspectives and reached deeper levels of understanding about themselves, their students, and their communities. Christa's words articulate why:

> This opportunity to go inward has made me grow more this year than I could have ever imagined. It has benefited me as a person and in the classroom, because I'm not making mistakes and then blindly repeating them. Instead, I am reflecting and growing from them. And I don't know if I would have done it to this extent if I hadn't been given the space to personally reflect. (Christa, Interview, June 2015)

This dissertation revealed that setting intentions and taking the time to reflect on them was an integral part of the process of creating a vision for themselves, their classrooms, and their worlds as they entered into this new chapter of their lives. Intention and reflection set the foundation for their transformation—it served as their compass for growth. Although most of them appreciated this reflective process, some, like Marissa, at first did not understand the point of continuing to revisit their intentions over time.

> The thought of intention setting for an ambitious person, at first, seemed tedious and redundant. I thought that because I had ambition and determination to get myself and my students where we need to be, my intentions were clear to myself and to others. Ilana

> asking me to set an intention for myself and for my students every single month seemed confusing. I had already told her last September; what more was there? (Marissa, Reflection, August 2015)

Yet, by making the conscious effort to reflect and continuously create new visions for who they intended to become, transformation not only became possible; it actually happened. However, they did not necessarily see these changes right away. It was in the dynamic creation of and the reflecting back upon these intentions that their own biases and unacknowledged privileges came to the surface.

> The push to reflect and set intentions made me realize that ambition can be blind, and that intentions are more nuanced. Through this constant cyclical process, I began to realize that my intentions for my students were filled with my own experiences of public schooling. It wasn't until I started questioning my own intentions, and asking myself why I wanted these things for my students, that I realized I was basically pushing to give them the same high quality education that I had received in white suburbia—and perhaps it was actually more complicated than that. Perhaps I needed to reflect even further on what it truly means to give students a responsive and individualized education rather than just a carbon copy of what has made me successful. In my school, this is considered a radical idea, but I think it's actually revelatory, and I wouldn't have been able to reach this conclusion without the monthly reflections. (Marissa, Reflection, August 2015)

Marissa's revelation of the increased self-awareness and expanded perspective she gained as a result of intention setting and reflection exemplifies how utilizing these practices can serve as a foundation for individual and collective transformation.

Community Building. The second component of our theory of action addresses the critical need to foster a community of mutual support among educators, which Lave and Wenger (1998) argue provides optimal opportunities for engagement and learning. Teachers face similar challenges and share similar passions as one another. Yet, the job of the teacher often feels very isolating, which, according to Chopra (2015), is a symptom of a lack of social well-being that can contribute to decreases in happiness and performance.

Within the context of my research, community building through collaborative reflection empowered these teachers to prioritize their well-being, work through their suppressed emotions, and create a space for their voices to be heard. As Chapters Four through Six revealed, their participation in our community of practice made them feel like they were not alone, and helped them reframe their stories in a way that enhanced their agency. Their relationships and interactions with those in our community served as an accountability system that motivated them to transform themselves and their teaching.

> I didn't really realize going into this community what it would do for me. In a lot of ways, it's been so therapeutic. I have released things that I didn't even know I was holding onto, and that has been huge. I didn't realize how badly I needed the space to acknowledge my fears, express my emotions, and realize my growth. (Andrea, Interview, July 2015)

The sense of community we formed also empowered those who had not previously felt comfortable speaking up to participate in conversations about issues of social justice in their schools and communities.

> In my past, I was more passive… I didn't really think my voice mattered. But after participating in this community, which gave me the chance to reflect and connect with my own and others' teaching and personal experiences, the issues I am seeing are not just passing me by. I'm actually thinking about them, wondering how I feel about them, and what I want to do with each situation as it unfolds. So, being a part of a community definitely changed me for the better—and my students too. (Linh, Interview, June 2015)

In addition to empowering teacher voice, reflection, and agency, my research has led me to believe that cultivating a supportive network can also help teachers hold themselves and each other accountable for implementing socially just pedagogical practices. Cynhia's words demonstrate why:

> Being a part of a community of teachers talking about issues of social justice definitely shapes how you engage with your students and the people around you. I feel like the more I engage in critical dialogue with my colleagues, the more natural it becomes to integrate new techniques to support student learning. Being reflective about yourself with teachers in and outside of school… it transfers. So why are we not helping teachers do more of this together? (Cynhia, Interview, July 2015)

By creating opportunities for teachers to join together and support one another in addressing the everyday issues they face in their classrooms and communities, I believe that teachers will gain the emotional and professional support that are currently lacking at both the school and district levels.

Wellness For Teachers. The third component of our theory of action involves the incorporation of evidence-based wellness practices (e.g., yoga, mindfulness, breathwork, etc.)

into teachers' lives. These tools, as the research in the previous chapters has revealed, can serve to help teachers more effectively handle daily stresses. Giving teachers access to techniques that aim to calm their minds and open their hearts will help teachers build closer relationships with themselves, their students, and their school communities. Lauren's reflection is a living example of how teachers' utilization of these strategies can manifest transformation in both their lives and their teaching:

> Mindfulness and yoga has transformed my ability to manage a classroom, as well as my own thoughts and emotions. Through these practices, I am better able to reflect upon challenges in the moment. All teachers and students can benefit from these practices. Yoga, mindfulness, and self-care enable the individual to actively understand their mind-body connection and act upon this knowledge to be in the right place for teaching or learning. (Lauren, Reflection, June 2015)

According to all eight teachers, cultivating inner strength through wellness practices improved their morale and their classroom culture. They found that their own ability to be present, calm, and focused had positive ripple effects on their students' social-emotional and academic learning. Teachers also found that wellness techniques deepened their reflective process, a critical component of growing and sustaining the self-awareness required for effective teaching for social justice.

> There's so much that goes into being a reflective teacher—a big part of it is self-care. If I'm not waking up early enough to do that exercise and meditation piece, there's no way I'm going to be reflecting and writing down my thoughts. I now know that being able to reflect back on my thoughts and see how much I've grown (and what in particular I'm

> growing from), is invaluable to my teaching. It's been really beneficial. Through this reflective process, I can see how much my teaching and my students have transformed. And it was yoga and mindfulness that gave me access to this deep reflection. (Christa, Reflection, June 2015)

Through the incorporation of these wellness practices into their classrooms and lives, educators can be better supported in "teaching through struggle"—a pedagogical tenet Cochran-Smith and Power (2010) argue is at the heart of social justice teaching.

Holistic Pedagogical Practices. The fourth component of our theory of action involves the integration of social-emotional and mind-body practices into instruction. My belief, and what this dissertation research confirmed, is that these tools have the ability to foster a positive classroom community, enhance students' social-emotional skills, and improve academic performance. Christa reminds us that if we want to change the world for students, we must place more value on the "whole" child, as opposed to just the "holes" they fill out with a #2 pencil on standardized tests:

> As a society, we have become so focused on literacy and math that it seems we have lost our value in the whole child. The unintended consequences of this pedagogy is that an abundance of highly talented and creative children think they are not, because the talents that they embody are not valued and are even stigmatized in the classroom community. When children believe in their abilities, their whole world can change. (Christa, Reflection, July 2015)

I believe that the integration of practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and community building into the classroom will foster an environment in which students feel confident and

whole, increasing their capacity to fulfill their potential both in and outside of school. As research shows, these practices have the ability to help students reduce stress, improve focus, and enhance engagement (e.g., Black & Fernando,2014; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009); the teachers in this dissertation also found that embodying and focusing on holistic well-being in the classroom also improved classroom management and provided more time for engaged teaching and learning.

> Since incorporating brief yoga and meditation breaks into my classroom twice a day, the days go by so much faster and we get so much more done with so much less conflict. Before, students were getting in fights in my classroom multiple times a day. Student conflict, for a multitude of reasons, is one of the greatest deterrents from student achievement in my school community. Now that I have started morning and afternoon yoga and meditation, alongside peace circles and restorative practices, I have not had a single student conflict problem inside of my classroom. (Marissa, Reflection September 2015)

The integration of these wellness practices into the classroom builds off the foundation of the previous key component; it is critical that teachers experience the benefits of social-emotional and mind-body practices for themselves so that they can *embody* their effects with students in the classroom. By training teachers with the tools and strategies to integrate holistic pedagogical practices—with ongoing support from community—classrooms and entire school communities have the potential to transform.

Systemic Teacher Support. The final component of our theory of action involves systemic change at the school, district, and national levels. Educational and political leaders must

adapt programs, practices, and policies in order to provide the support that is currently lacking for teachers in cultivating their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

It became clear through my research that teachers lack the training or professional development necessary to deal with the wide-range of stressors they face (e.g., administrative and curricular demands, challenging student behaviors, cultural barriers, etc.) and the wide range of stressors their students face (e.g., poverty, violence, high-stakes tests, etc.). As their stories revealed, the majority of professional development these eight teachers received focused on academic content, curriculum development, and evaluation and assessment—not on their own or their students' well-being. In recognizing the critical connection between well-being and teaching and learning, it is essential to shift the professional development paradigm to include development of the teacher's own health and well-being.

> I'm hoping that our stories will impact how school districts plan for professional development opportunities that address taking care of our well-being. Most talk is about the problem of being stressed and having teachers whose passion for teaching is fading, but rarely do we have conversations about any solutions to support teachers. [We need] a positive step in the right direction for creating actual solutions. (Linh, Reflection, August 2015)

The first four components of our theory of action focus on creating change within the current paradigm—or, as Marissa would say, to "work alongside the system to positively impact and uplift it" (Marissa, Reflection, July 2015). This fifth key component posits that, while working from the bottom up, it is also critical to engage administrators, academics, policy

makers, and other important educational stakeholders in the conversation in order to create systemic change (and, to enhance their well-being too!)

From Purpose to Vision

> You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.
>
> —Buckminster Fuller, 1982

These eight teachers—along with the millions of other teachers who are working just as hard every day to address the inequities impacting our students—inspired me to put this theory of action into practice by creating a solution that would disrupt the critical problem that had surfaced through our collective research. I agreed with Fuller (1982) that in order to create the change we wanted to see, we would need to build a new model that could support teachers and entire school communities in managing their stress and finding their inner peace despite external chaos. Drawing on the key components mentioned above, I set out to start a movement—through an organization named Breathe For Change—to train teachers how to incorporate wellness practices that have been shown to increase happiness, performance, and productivity into their classrooms and lives (Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). I envisioned Breathe For Change becoming a platform that would transform teaching and learning, as well as allow scholars to expand upon the research that began within the scope of my dissertation project. Over time, I hoped that for our future research to contribute cutting-edge insights, impact educational policies, and create tangible change for teachers and students in classrooms around the world.

While I intended for Breathe For Change to contribute to educational research, I also recognized that cultivating vulnerable spaces for teachers to reflect, heal, and talk about their

inner lives would only be possible if I were to push beyond the boundaries of the ivory tower. I agreed with Palmer (1998) that, "If we want to grow as teachers—we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives—risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract" (p. 12). I also believed that, as teachers, we need to move beyond talking just about our inner lives and begin exploring how they are connected to our outer lives to ensure *alignment* between the two. For achieving the alignment of our internal thoughts and intentions with our external words and actions is what I believe to be the experience of liberation—which, as the results of my dissertation research demonstrate, is what becomes possible when we cultivate holistic well-being.

From Vision to Reality: The Birth of a Movement

> I feel like Breathe For Change is so important, because not everyone understands what it really means and feels like to be a teacher… I think the more we can focus on what does work, and the more we can learn tools to better approach challenging situations, the better we will be at supporting our students academically and emotionally. I feel so grateful that someone is listening, and that someone thought that what I had to say was important and worth doing something about.
>
> —Elizabeth, Interview, June 2015

An Evolving Narrative

When I first shared my vision for Breathe For Change with our community of practice, it began to dramatically shift the conversation from "How are we doing?" to "How can we do

better?" and pulled us into an active dialogue oriented toward change and transformation. As far as my research, this meant expanding my scope from just studying how ideas of social justice are *currently* being translated into action, to studying how implementing the theory of action described above could enhance these teachers' ability to fulfill on their intentions for themselves and their teaching. While this new focus brought in new variables that were not initially part of the equation, and further increased the subjective influence I was having on the outcomes, it also provided the rare opportunity to see what happens when teacher researchers truly honor their subjects' ideas and stories, and include them in the development of all aspects of their research—from creation to implementation to action.

In January 2015, when I started to spread the word about Breathe For Change more broadly, I immediately received overwhelming support and participation from my students and colleagues in the teacher education program, as well as educators, friends, family, and community advocates outside the university. This involvement from the educational community expanded the scope of influence the eight teachers in this study were able to have and the support they were able to receive. As the organization began to grow, our community of practice became a more fluid community that organically shifted and changed as a result of the evolving network. The act of engaging administrators, parents, researchers, wellness experts, and other educational leaders, I believe, enhanced the quality of the research—for it pushed us to consider the meaning of our shared narrative outside the comfort zone of our close community and within the context of the education system at large. In sharing our stories more broadly, we realized that the limited perspective we had as a small group of new teachers was just one piece of the larger puzzle—but a very critical and missing one. By vulnerably sharing and inviting in other perspectives, we

hoped to expand upon our limited experience and explore how the community of support we had created could be adapted, modified, and scaled to address the needs of teachers and students across the country, and eventually around the world.

The Beginnings of Breathe For Change

> Breathe For Change is on a mission to transform education by enhancing the health and well-being of teachers, students, and school communities around the world.
>
> —Breathe For Change, 2015

No matter who I shared my vision for Breathe For Change with, the consistent response seemed to be: "I'm in. How can I help?" Within weeks of its inception, I had already recruited a team of education, yoga, mindfulness, and wellness experts from across the country to help me develop a high-quality, holistic wellness curriculum for educators grounded in cutting-edge research (e.g., Davidson, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Within the first month, dozens of scholars, leaders, and educators from across various disciplines had joined these teachers and me in the movement to transform education through improving teacher and student well-being.

By February, our monthly community calls—that originated with just the nine of us—started transforming into weekly in-person and conference call meetings that connected educators and social justice advocates around the world. As the word spread, teachers and community members continued to join the conversation in rapidly growing numbers to help plan the world's only 200-hour wellness and yoga teacher training specifically designed for educators (Yoga Alliance Certified). By March, hundreds of people were engaged (e.g., teachers, team members, advisors, corporate partners, legal and business experts, etc.) and our legal and operational infrastructures started to form. By April, we had established volunteer committees

(e.g., equity and diversity, marketing, fundraising, etc.), and educators who had already signed up to participate in the 200-hour wellness training stepped up as active members of the team. On May 1st, we won the education award at University of Wisconsin's Burrill Business Plan Competition, and by the end of the month, over a thousand people were following us on social media, and our team had collectively raised $15,000 in scholarship funds for educators. By June we were participating in a business accelerator program and had successfully recruited 34 pre-k through college level educators (including Christa, Lauren, Marissa, and Mia) from across the country for Breathe For Change's inaugural teacher training that would take place in Madison from June 23 through July 8, 2015.

Transformation in Action: The Inaugural Training

All of this culminated in what Christa, Lauren, Marissa, and Mia each described as one of "the most transformational experiences of our lives" (Interviews & Reflections, July 2015). Our summer training brought together five expert trainers in education, yoga, and wellness for 16 straight days to teach 34 educators from across the nation how to better care for themselves so they can better care for their students. During the training, I witnessed teachers undergo critical shifts in their perceptions, gaining a deeper awareness of the importance of their own well-being and its impact on their teaching.

The story of our first and second intention-setting circles at the training truly exemplified the ways in which participating educators underwent this transformation. As the 39 of us teachers and trainers joined together vulnerably in a circle on the first day of our training, I invited them each to set and share their personal intentions for *their own* self-transformation. Despite the fact that I had explicitly asked teachers to focus on themselves, every single one of

them ended up sharing a goal that centered on their students (e.g., "I want to help my students calm their minds," "I want to build a stronger classroom community," "I want to learn how to better manage my students," etc.). Like the eight teachers I followed for my dissertation, the majority of educators in our training focused on caring for their students instead of caring for themselves, even when directly prompted to focus on themselves.

Six days later, almost halfway through the training, it was time for our second intention-setting circle. But, this time, I asked a different question: What are your intentions for your *students* and your *teaching*? Their answers left me in tears, humbled, and speechless. Every single person in the circle in some way made the connection between their own well-being and their students' well-being (e.g., "My intention is to be happier so my students are happier," "My intention is to eat healthier, breathe more, and model these practices for my kids so that they too can embody these ways of being," "I will be a better teacher for my students if I let myself finally feel all the emotions I've bottled up for so long," etc.). Their responses demonstrated a newfound consciousness of the fact that their ability to serve students depended on their ability to take care of themselves. After having spent six full days in the Breathe For Change training breathing, reflecting, moving and "refilling their cups" (Mia, Interview, July 2015), they came to the same conclusion that these eight teachers and I had come to through sharing our narratives with each other in this dissertation. That is: in order to become the teachers they intended to become, they needed to ensure that their own needs were being met, too.

Beyond the Dissertation: Changing The World, One Teacher at a Time

> I think that Breathe for Change will have a cyclical effect on the world. As we train our teachers to understand their mind-body connection, we will teach our children to understand their own. As our children grow to understand their own, they will teach their friends, families and communities… spreading the impact further and further.
>
> —Lauren, Reflection, August 2015

By the end of our training, it became clear that Breathe For Change was going to be my life's work—and that the movement that had emerged during the evolution of this dissertation had the potential to change the world. I now knew that I was not destined to work solely within academia; yet, I recognized the invaluable opportunity to use my position as a scholar to document and share these teachers' stories of struggle and transformation with a larger audience.

These teachers' stories had led me to discover something powerful, something real, something *human* that people from all walks of life connected to on a deep level. I knew that I had an obligation to share these teachers' collective stories; for, as narrative inquirer Wilson (2001) reminded me: "you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research… you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship?" (p. 177). In vulnerably sharing their truths, stories, and insights throughout the school year, these eight teachers had beautifully fulfilled their role in our inquiry—now that the year had come to a close, it was my turn to fulfill mine.

Moved by the Movement

As I continued to work on my dissertation, however, I became faced with a dilemma. The teachers who had graduated from our training were now spreading word of their transformative

experiences with their colleagues, administrations, and communities—and schools around the country began requesting to partner with Breathe For Change. My heart was pulled to support the hundreds of teachers at these schools who I knew were pouring their energy into serving thousands of students, and who I also imagined were facing similar struggles to those our community of practice had faced.

Fortunately, in the Fall of 2015, a talented team of five full-time and seven part-time young leaders had become (*almost*) as inspired as I was about our mission and chose to dedicate their careers to growing what was quickly becoming a full-blown organization. This dynamic group of people, along with dozens of passionate volunteers, gave me the space to sit down and write this dissertation while we collectively supported a growing number of teachers and school communities. During this time, Breathe For Change also developed cutting-edge curriculum and programs to enhance teacher and student well-being, including a school-wide wellness program that our trained educators were certified to lead for their entire school communities. These school-wide programs include weekly wellness classes, monthly wellness guides, and quarterly professional development workshops for all teachers and staff—each of which progress through our themes of transformation of self, transformation of teaching, and transformation of school community. In the first six months of the 2015-16 school year, we launched our school-wide wellness program in nine schools (including Christa's), hosted dozens of workshops and events for thousands of educators impacting tens of thousands of students, and recruited over 150 more teacher champions to participate in three 200-hour wellness trainings for educators in Summer 2016.

Now, as the written portion of this dissertation is coming to a close, the movement that emerged is just entering its initial phase of growth; by the end of 2016 we are planning to train and certify 250 educators to be wellness experts and to implement school-wide wellness programs in 50 schools. We are expanding our trainings to the Bay Area, CA (hosted by UC Berkeley, July 11-26, 2016) and New York City (hosted by Sesame Workshop and BrainPop, August 1-16, 2016) and will be doing two more trainings in Madison, WI (the first hosted by UW-Madison's School of Education, June 17- July 2, 2016 and the second in the fall in local schools) to accommodate the surplus of teachers from all over the country that continue to apply for our training.

The direct feedback Breathe For Change has been receiving through interviews, surveys, focus groups, program evaluations, and unsolicited letters of appreciation further confirm that teachers across diverse educational landscapes are experiencing firsthand a decline in well-being and its impact on their teaching—the same trend these eight teachers and I uncovered through the telling and re-telling of our stories. In almost every interview we have conducted, applicants have told us how deeply they connect to Breathe For Change's mission to enhance the health and well-being of teachers, students, and school communities (e.g., "These practices have changed my life, and Breathe For Change is what I've been waiting for," "I am so grateful that teachers are finally being recognized, and our well-being prioritized," "I have been waiting for this type of supportive community for 20+ years," "If this opportunity didn't present itself, I might have quit because it is just so stressful...but now I have hope, and a community of people who can hold each other up" etc.). The increasing number and diversity of participants in our programs

continues to open up exciting new opportunities to expand this research beyond the scope of my dissertation.

It is my hope that by sharing the incredible amount of traction our movement has gained in such a short time, I will inspire you, the reader, just as all of those who have participated in this project—including myself—have been inspired. For what we came across together in our community of practice was something "so much greater than ourselves," as Mia put it (Mia, Reflection, June 2015). It was a universal problem, a critical gap in our current educational paradigm—one that, if addressed in a unified manner by educators, administrators, academics, policymakers, and community members alike, has the potential to transform our education system from the inside out.

Through our community of practice's inquiry, our honest, human, vulnerable stories have spoken—and now, people are listening. I hope the educational research community uses this unique opportunity "to recognize, and to take into account, the issues and the knowledge of teachers and others who work in schools" (Zeichner & Liston, 2013, p. 6) whose voices are so often absent from current educational discourses (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). For, just as teachers are the foundation of Breathe For Change, they are also the foundation of education. As Marissa reminds us, teachers need us to listen to their stories, and take their perspectives and needs into account:

> What teachers and students need more than anything is their real, authentic, human voices to be heard. We need you to know our stories. We need you to know what it's like to teach and learn in the midst of trauma, poverty and despair. We need you to believe us when we say we are trying to change what it means to go to public school in urban areas.

> We need a safe place to say those things without fear of being scrutinized. If that space can't be held, classroom doors will continue to remain closed, and the [inauthentic] "reflections" we share will continue to sound like what our administrators, officials, and policy makers need to hear in order to make them go away. (Marissa, Reflection, August 2015)

Coming Full Circle: Closing this Chapter, Opening the Next

> In a community, first you have to love yourself because if you don't love yourself, you can't love anybody else.
>
> —Patrick Nolan, Miss Ilana's former (four-year-old) pre-k student, 2010

As I arrive at the point where this dissertation must come to an end, I realize that the conclusion of this project is actually just the beginning of my life's work. Looking back at what these eight teachers and I explored, discovered, and created together through our narrative inquiry, I find myself feeling incredibly overwhelmed. Overwhelmed by the amount of both tears and laughter we shared, overwhelmed by the amount of injustice and challenges we struggled through, and overwhelmed by the amount of change we have been able to create together in such a short amount of time. More than anything, I feel overwhelmed with optimism, because despite our feelings of overwhelm, we found ways to transform ourselves, our teaching, and our communities against the odds (Souto-Manning, 2013).

We began as nine of us: eight teachers entering their first year in the classroom, and myself, a teacher educator and young researcher determined to understand the challenges my students would face in attempting to teach for social justice with young children. In Chapter Four, we told our personal histories, exposed our identities, and shared the individual and

collective visions we had cultivated during our time together in teacher education. We vulnerably revealed our optimism and "good intentions," and discussed the ways in which we knew we wanted to transform our students and school communities. Then, as these teachers transitioned into the actual classroom, we explored the challenges that arose as they began teaching in diverse and under-resourced school communities, and analyzed the ways in which they individually and collectively struggled to overcome these challenges. Finally, we examined the tensions that emerged between the visions these teachers had set for themselves and their actual experiences teaching in diverse educational landscapes.

Chapter Five began by illuminating how the tensions these teachers faced (often, with little to no support) were leading to significant decreases in their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Through our reflections, I began to see that these teachers' diminishing morale was negatively impacting their ability to sustain the self-awareness and optimism they had cultivated during teacher education. This realization moved us to explore the ways in which teacher well-being (or lack thereof) impacted these eight teachers' instructional practice and relationships with students and families. Through this exploration, the deeply connected nature of teacher well-being and student social-emotional and academic learning revealed itself, helping us to find hope in what felt like hopeless times.

Chapter Six revealed the story of how our community of practice's newfound understandings inspired us to seek and tap into sources of healing in order to transform ourselves and our teaching despite challenging external circumstances. I first illuminated the way these teachers and I came to understand that, in order to fulfill our intentions for our teaching, we would need to learn to live and teach within what Palmer (2012) describes as the "tragic

gap"—the vulnerable space between idealism and cynicism where real change can occur. I then described how many of these teachers devoted themselves to integrating self-care and mind-body practices into their classrooms and lives in order to find the inner strength to live and teach within the tragic gap. Finally, I revealed the incredible transformations these teachers experienced in doing so—not only of themselves, but also of their teaching and school communities—and concluded by sharing how the individual and collective insights we had gained had already begun transforming into something larger than we could have ever imagined.

Finally, in this chapter, I grounded these teachers' narratives within the larger context of the current education system, revealing the potential our findings have for creating systemic change. I first shared the ways in which the stories of these eight teachers are a microcosm of the struggles and transformations teachers are experiencing in classrooms across the country. Next, I described how I found my life's purpose by weaving together the emerging ideas from our discussions into a theory of action that could empower educators around the world—and explained how this dramatically shifted the narrative of this dissertation. I then went on to tell the story of how this theory of action has transformed into a movement to improve the health and well-being of teachers, students, and school communities called Breathe For Change. To conclude, I shared how this movement is now positively impacting thousands of teachers and students and providing an incredible foundation from which to expand upon the research that began in this dissertation.

As we draw to a close, I return to where we began: the story of the teacher. In this conclusion (and in the following afterword), I allow the powerful voices of the eight teachers who inspired this movement to speak to the potential and real impact of our work together. I

leave you now with a letter Christa was inspired to write to *you,* the reader, as a result of having participated in our community of practice and in Breathe For Change. I feel very vulnerable sharing her words with you, because they are partially about me. But, like I encouraged the eight teachers to do throughout this journey, I, too, am choosing to surrender and let go of the anxiety I feel in exposing the deep parts of me that make me whole. For, I truly believe that, as Palmer (1998) stated "By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am" (p. 13).

I hope that Christa's words give you hope that positive change will continue to happen—because it will. And I hope her words help you see the power of what we have created, and inspire you to join the thousands of people becoming a part of our movement to change the world, one teacher at a time.

Dear Reader,

I am so grateful you took the time to listen to our voices, hear our stories, and learn from our struggles and transformations as young teachers committed to creating a more socially just world for our children.

Perhaps you are a teacher yourself, or the parent of a student, or a citizen who's passionate about making education more meaningful and equitable for the next generation of learners and leaders who will carry us forward. Either way, we have something in common: an interest in children, an interest in the future, and an acknowledgment of the critical need for great change.

My journey to becoming a teacher started in high school when I would go home feeling inspired, proud, and fulfilled by the relationships I cultivated with children and

their families as an after school teacher. I knew I craved a job that could bring me happiness and fulfillment, but I had heard that teaching comes with so many emotions (the good, the bad, and the ugly), and I questioned whether I could really thrive at a job that takes such an enormous emotional toll. I wondered whether I would be able to give children the love and commitment they deserve, year in and year out, and still have enough energy left to support a family of my own. However, remembering the impact that a few incredible teachers had had on me when I struggled as a student, and recognizing how happy it makes me to empower and bring joy to children, I knew I had no choice but to dedicate my life to teaching, and I haven't regretted that choice since.

Many people go into education because they want to make a difference in their community, society, and in time, the world. I am one of those people, and I am happy to say that so is my colleague, mentor, and friend, Ilana. Knowing Ilana and participating in this community has profoundly altered the course of my life. She supported us through our first years of teaching, saw what we needed (and realized all teachers needed it), and now here you are today reading a book that has the potential to generate world-wide support for the health and well-being of teachers, students, and school communities.

Steve Jobs once said, "the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do." It's as if he were speaking about Ilana. This project is bigger than anything I ever could have imagined, and it is so needed. Teaching is not a profession for the weak hearted. It is hard, and if you are not careful, you give and give until you are unable to give anymore. Most people do go into this profession for all the right reasons—but as many people know, teaching has a terrible burnout rate. And our

schools are losing many of these passionate people, not because they want to leave, but because they have other options that would dramatically improve their working conditions.

Despite the low pay, stressful demands, long hours, and teach-to-the-test mentality, I have never once regretted taking this path. As a teacher, I have the privilege of waking up each morning and making a lasting impression on young children and their families' lives. Every day I have the honor of believing in and standing for students so they can believe in and stand for themselves—regardless of whether they demand my love in the most unloving ways. And when a child's innocent tears triggers the same response in me, I know that the heartbreak I feel means I've found my way of connecting to humanity. Now, thanks to Ilana, I know I have the tools and support to be able to serve in this way for the rest of my career.

Every child, educator, parent, and community member deserves to have access to tools that help cultivate a healthy and happy life. In many children and even adults, discomfort quickly turns to anger or anxiety—but it doesn't have to be that way. We can teach ourselves and our children another option. Our communities deserve the opportunity to turn inward in an increasingly outward lived society. If we want to see pedagogical shifts and social change, we all need to overcome fear and discomfort to transform our own inner biases and ignorance.

As educators, we not only have the ability to transform ourselves through wellness practices and community; we have an obligation to do so for our teaching. We have an obligation to our students, our school communities, and all of society to create a

foundation of our own well-being so that a ripple effect may take place. Educators need to know that they have permission to refill their own pail and to practice self-care; in a profession where there is always something to do or do better, we feel selfish giving ourselves what we need. This mentality cannot continue.

I hope educators begin to see that by practicing self-love and self-care you cultivate those practices within your classroom, within your students, within your community, within society and beyond. I hope this project helps teachers, students, and all people, understand that *they are enough*, and that together, we can collectively create this shift in education that we so desperately need.

Best regards,

Christa

Afterword

Testimonials from the Teachers who Inspired Breathe For Change

Collective Transformation

> The voices of teachers… are absent from the literature of research on teaching.
>
> —Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990, p. 83

As a scholar, I am not willing to stand for a system that silences the voices of those who have the greatest impact on our students. For, as this dissertation revealed, teachers' stories have so much to teach us. Thus, in this afterword, I choose to present these teachers' first-hand accounts of how they believe our collective work has and will continue to generate positive change in education across the world.

Breathe For Change's interrelated layers of transformation—which were partially informed by Souto-Manning's (2013) notion of multicultural education as transformative education—include transformation of self, teaching, school community, and society. The testimonials in the following sections reveal what becomes possible when teachers are given a voice and supported in taking care of their well-being.

Transformation of Self

The reflections presented in this section showcase the deeply personal transformations experienced by the four teachers from this dissertation study who participated in our 200-hour Breathe For Change wellness training in the summer of 2015 (Christa, Lauren, Marissa, and Mia). Their words suggest that any teacher who creates the space and time in their worlds to breathe, reflect, and cultivate inner peace has the potential to heal and transform.

> Breathe For Change brought me closer to… me. It showed me how to search within for the answers, security, comfort, etc.
>
> —Christa (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> During Breathe for Change, I was in a time of crisis and self-healing. I had recently lost a parent figure to cancer, was forced to leave my family, friends, and students in a foreign

> country and return home, and was re-acclimating to American culture. Breathe For change allowed me to heal. I truly believe that if I had not been provided with this opportunity, if I had not learned the ability to open up my emotions, self-regulate and relax, I would not have made it through the first quarter of teaching within Wisconsin's public education system. I owe everything I am this year to the experience I shared with so many incredible educators and the skills I gained this summer.
>
> —Lauren (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> Breathe For Change taught me patience I didn't know I had. I reworked the thoughts of failure I had within myself from my first year of teaching into an idea of trial and error. I forgave myself for not providing my students with the perfect education I felt like they deserved.
>
> —Marissa (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> It made me confront my own emotions and expression, which I am still working on. It allowed me to see my own inner light, and gave me confidence! It taught me ways I could calm myself down, in almost any type of situation. It helped me become more healthy—mentally, spiritually and emotionally. It gave me something to believe in… I learned about the spiritual parts of your body, and where stress and bad feelings can be carried within you. It made me confront my inner fears that were blocking me from being fully expressed. Mostly, it made me spend almost 3 weeks of time focused on me, myself and I. It showed me how important my well-being is on my life overall. I continue to work on expressing my emotions, letting go, and not feeling guilty. But without this training, I would not have the tools to be able to work on any of these things.
>
> —Mia (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

Transformation of Teaching

The testimonials in this section illustrate how our collective work together positively impacted teachers' instructional practices and their relationships with students, shedding light on the critical need to support teacher well-being in order to enhance teaching and learning.

> Above all, it taught me to let things go! It helped me become more flexible and accepting as a teacher. It helped me share myself with my students, without feeling nervous or embarrassed. I continue to use the tools I learned during instruction and in chaotic situations. Everyday, I feel or choose to do something new that I know is because of my training with Breathe for Change. It is hard to write down in words. But I feel it in my heart wherever I go!
>
> —Mia (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> Teaching students to understand internal emotions, empathize with peers, and self-regulate has always been one of my greatest joys in teaching. Breathe For Change taught me multiple avenues of practical application for these skills that could easily be

brought into the classroom. My students have begun to take on these skills on their own, as well as encourage others to do so when in need. I'm so proud, I could cry.

—Lauren (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

Since incorporating brief yoga and meditation breaks into my classroom twice a day, the days go by so much faster and we get so much more done with so much less conflict. Last year, before the training, students were getting in fights in my classroom multiple times a day. This is a problem throughout my entire school. Student conflict, for a multitude of reasons, is one of the greatest deterrents from student achievement in my school community. This year, I started morning and afternoon yoga and meditation, alongside peace circles and restorative practices and have not had a single student conflict problem inside of my classroom.

—Marissa (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

I am better able to be the type of person I want my students to grow up to be: calm, compassionate, mindful. By valuing the whole child and by practicing mindfulness in the classroom I am able to create a positive classroom environment where everyone can feel safe to explore the world and its opportunities.

—Christa (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

We do a lot of breathing because there's no room for them to even move their arms. But even the different ways that they've learned to move their head to center themselves or the breathing techniques or visualizations we use make a big difference. It's meditative for us all. And it only takes a couple of minutes… we do it after recess and then it chills them out, and then they're ready to move on. Right now I really want them to know that they can change their attitude by changing their body physically, and it's working.

—Cynhia, Interview, September 2015

Our work has enabled me to foster a more positive atmosphere in my classroom, and to release stress when I am dealing with challenging behaviors. I think that my students at their age and in this community, often don't know how to regulate their emotions when they are upset. This is another tool that my students and I can use in our classroom to create the most positive, safe learning environment.

—Linh, Reflection, September 2015

Seeing kids suffer will either burn you out or light your fire—you just need people around you to support you as you figure out how to light your fire. That's what Breathe For Change is making possible for teachers.

—Elizabeth, Reflection, October 2015

Transformation of School Community

The reflections in this section demonstrate how giving teachers the tools to improve their own and their students' well-being can profoundly impact entire school communities (e.g., students, families, administrators, staff, etc.). It also reveals the broad variety of ways in which wellness practices can used to help transform school culture and cultivate engaging learning environments for teachers, staff, students, and families.

> Wow. So far I have had my co-workers say amazing things. The simple fact that our principal is dedicating time, energy, and money to the school's staff members sends a big message: She cares. She wants us to be healthy and practice self-care. She is making it known that it is okay to not be perfect, to need support. It has brought us together closer as a [school] family and I feel it will bring us closer as a community once we begin to reach out to families.
>
> —Christa (B4C School Wellness Champion), Reflection, September 2015

> Breathe For Change has, in part, contributed to the growing conversation about what it really means to "manage" a classroom. We are now talking about how to create spaces and environments that support self-regulation and metacognition, rather than forcing students to adhere to strict standards of behavior and performance.
>
> —Marissa (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> My students will leave First Grade as a community of learners with a deep understanding of their own emotions. They will take these skills with them throughout their education, sharing them with new teachers and classmates.
>
> —Lauren (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> As a newbie, Breathe For Change has allowed me to have something to share with others. I use what learned as energizers to engage my students in learning, and as relaxation techniques after high-energy activities. I was asked to teach yoga to a group of students who have already been practicing mindfulness. I feel like an expert in well-being and I can offer advice to my co-teachers and team members… It is still a daily process for me, but I think that helps the kids and other teachers see that you never stop learning or practicing mindfulness; it is a constant act that will be challenged and strengthened throughout your life experiences.
>
> —Mia (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

Transformation of Society

This section shares these teachers' vision for how Breathe For Change is already having ripple effects that can ultimately transform the education system and society. Their voices help us gain insight into how focusing on teacher (and student) well-being can and will help cultivate a happier, healthier, and more peaceful world.

> Honestly the most powerful message I think Breathe for Change sends is that the public school system belongs to the public. As a community of social justice-minded educators, we had the power to create something so impactful and get real results—without approval or help from the greater system at large. So many people can talk about being "change agents", just because they exist in spaces that need changing—but we actually did it. On a societal level, this courageous action can spark a movement and a mindset shift to empower the communities we live in. What better example to leave for our students? Our minds and bodies are not constrained by our circumstances, we are limitless.
>
> —Marissa (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> The more this movement spreads, the more and more people will be impacted. I hope that it can trickle into politics, world leaders and businesses alike. Every single human on this planet can benefit from mindfulness! I think the world would be a much more happy and relaxed place if everyone just stopped to breathe every so often.
>
> —Mia (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

> I'm hoping that Breathe For Change will impact how school districts plan for professional development opportunities that address taking care of our well-being. Most talk is about the problem of being stressed and having teachers whose passion for teaching is fading, but rarely do we have conversations about any solutions to support teachers. Breathe For Change is a positive step in the right direction for creating solutions.
>
> —Linh, Reflection, September 2015

> I think that if teachers had a community like Breathe For Change, there would be more teachers. I think that there would be a lot more reflective teachers. I think that teachers would be better understood. They wouldn't be undermined as much because it gives them a voice. It helps people too… it helps me feel validated. And with that being said, it has a ripple effect. If teachers are happy, students are going to be happier than if teachers weren't happy. And families are going to be happier. And if families are happier then governments will change too.
>
> —Cynhia, Interview, September 2015

> Mindfulness and yoga has transformed my ability to manage a classroom, as well as my own thoughts and emotions. Through these practices, I am better able to reflect upon

challenges in the moment. All teachers and students can benefit from these practices. Yoga, mindfulness, and self-care enable the individual to actively understand their mind-body connection and act upon this knowledge to be in the right place for teaching or learning. Integrating these practices into schools has the potential to transform education and society.

—Lauren (B4C Graduate), Reflection, September 2015

Appendices

Appendix A: Guiding Reflection Questions

Reflection Questions (Before First Day of School): August 2014
(Please send me this initial letter before your first day of school. You can write it as an informal letter or answer the questions one-by-one; whatever feels more authentic to you. And this can be an ongoing dialogue...we can have monthly letters officially, but feel free to create a document that you can write/draw on whenever you feel called to reflect on your experience.)

- Describe your transition from pre-service teacher education to now. What brought you to where you are now? (How have your beliefs, ideas, and practices changed overtime?)
- Tell me what you are thinking and experiencing knowing that your first year of teaching is around the corner.
- What are your fears? What are you most excited/passionate about?
- What is vision for yourself, your classroom, your community, etc.?
- Share whatever it is that captures your authentic experience, perspectives and thinking right now.
- What are your intentions for participating in this ongoing reflective, growth opportunity and community of practice?

August/September 2014
Guiding Reflection Questions (After 1st Week of Teaching):

- What does it mean to be a good teacher?
- What does teaching for social justice mean to you?

September 2014
Guiding Reflection Questions (1st Month of Teaching):
Describe your experience teaching in your first month of school. Below are guiding questions (take this in whatever direction you want...these are just suggestions):

- How are you feeling after your first month?
- What stories stand out to you?
- What surprised you, scared you, challenged you, moved you, made you proud, etc.?
- What does teaching for social justice mean to you?
- What has the transition from teacher education to teaching been like?
- Intentions moving forward...

October 2014
Reflection Questions (2nd Month of Teaching):
Please reflect however you need to reflect, or write whatever you need to write...any stories that are sticking out to you. You can answer whichever ones are especially calling to you:

- What have been the biggest "aha moments" in your teaching experience thus far?

- What has your experience been like specifically teaching students that are culturally, linguistically, racially, or ethnically different from you?
- What have been some of the biggest tensions for you in these first few months of teaching?
- What are your unfulfilled needs? What do you imagine your experience might look like if you were to get these needs met? for you? your students?
- How are you thinking about social justice now? Has it changed (since before/during/after teacher education and teaching)? If so, how? If not, why?

November 2014
Guiding Reflection Questions (3rd Month of Teaching):
Please reflect however you need to reflect, or write whatever you need to write...any stories that are sticking out to you. You can answer whichever ones are especially calling to you:

- What are you most proud of about your teaching up to this point?
- What are your biggest fears right now?
- What is surprising you?
- What is your experience like with students different from you (racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, etc.)? What are you learning about teaching students from diverse backgrounds? What are you learning about yourself in this process?
- What does it mean to be a good teacher? Has your ideas about this changed since teacher education?
- What do you miss most/least about teacher education?
- What are your intentions as a teacher for the rest of 2014?

December 2014
Guiding Reflection Questions (4th Month of Teaching):
Please reflect however you need to reflect, or write whatever you need to write...any stories that are sticking out to you. You can answer whichever ones are especially calling to you:

- Reflecting back on your experience teaching....
    - What have you learned about yourself?
    - What have you learned about teaching?
    - What have you learned about society?
    - What have you learned that you LEAST expected?
    - What do you want to be acknowledged for?
- How have you been able to translate what you learned in teacher education into your teaching? In contrast, how have you NOT been able to? What have been your greatest limitations?
- Thinking back on your teaching experience thus far and your experience in teacher education, what advice would you give teacher education programs regarding how to (better) prepare teachers to teach for social justice?

January 2015
Guiding Reflection Questions (5th Month of Teaching):

Please reflect however you need to reflect, or write whatever you need to write...any stories that are sticking out to you. You can answer whichever ones are especially calling to you:

- What are your main goals for 2015?
    - Personal goals (does not need to be related to school)
    - Goals for your teaching
    - Goals for your students
    - Goals you hope to achieve by the end of the school year
- How does it feel to be half way through your first year? What have you noticed about yourself? Your teaching? Your students? Families? Admin? Your life in general? How have your perspectives changed?
- As you move into the second half of the year, what are you excited about now? What scares you?
- What does teaching for social justice mean to you now? What does it look like, feel like, sound like in your classroom? (Give examples). Has this changed since teacher education/ the beginning of school? How?
- Reflect back on the day before school started this year. What would you tell yourself now after all that you've experienced? What advice would you give her knowing what you know now?
- Now think about the future you on the last day of school. What do you want to acknowledge her for? What advice do you have for "the future you" moving forward?

February 2015
Guiding Reflection Questions (6th Month of Teaching):
For February, I am going to get a little specific because a lot of you have been talking about your emotional well being and your students emotional well beings...and a lot of you have talking about using techniques, or wanting to learn techniques to improve in this area... so here it goes:

- How are you feeling in terms of your emotional well being as a teacher (now and over time)?
- How do (and DON'T) you take care of your well-being?
- How does your well being/self-care impact your teaching?
- Describe your students' well beings'...how are they emotionally?
- What strategies do you use to promote health and wellbeing?
- What would you like to learn?
- What type of training for educators would help you foster social/emotional growth for you and your students?

March 2015
Guiding Reflection Questions (7th Month of Teaching):
Please reflect however you need to reflect, or write whatever you need to write...any stories that are sticking out to you. You can answer whichever ones are especially calling to you:

- Why are you teaching? Has your reasoning changed since teacher education? If yes, How so?
- How are you feeling about your growth as a teacher? What are you proud of? What scares you?
- How are you feeling about your students' growth? What are you proud of? What scares you?
- What is something that you really want to transform for yourself/your teaching, but that you are totally afraid to confront? What is blocking you from taking on this challenge? Are you willing to let go of this and go for it? If so, declare your intention so that you can make it happen!
- What does social justice mean to you now? Is it changing?

April 2015
Guiding Reflection Questions (8th Month of Teaching):
For the April prompt, I am posing a question to you, that is extremely relevant to what's happening in educational discourses, now. I just returned from the American Education Research Association (AERA) conference, where Gloria Ladson-Billings (GLB) received the social justice award and gave a presidential address that problematized the term "social justice" and made me deeply reflect on what I think it means to teach for "social justice..." is teaching for social justice enough?

In sum, GLB said she worries that the term "social justice" is being overused in teaching and teacher education and argued that the issues facing our system and students are more than issues of "social justice." She said it is "JUST justice."

- What do you think about this? In your opinion, is there a difference between "justice" and "social justice"? If so, what do they each mean to you now and to your teaching? If not, share why you think they are similar. How does Gloria's point make you think about the future of education?

- Spend this month's entry, reflecting on what you think our role, as educators, is in addressing the injustices we witness each day in our classrooms (on a personal, classroom, and societal level). How are you playing a role already? What more do you want to do? What is stopping you?

May 2015
Guiding Reflection Prompt (9th Month of Teaching):
Write a personal letter to yourself (the YOU when you first started teaching). Use this as an opportunity to go inward, express gratitude, acknowledge yourself, reflect on your growth.

Appendix B: Community Call Facilitator Agendas

September 29, 2014
Community Call Facilitator Agenda (1st Month of Teaching):

- Introductions – Check in/teaching context
- What are your intentions for participating in this community of practice?
- What has your teaching experiences been like so far? (successes, challenges, surprises, etc.)
- How are you thinking about social justice in your teaching?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

October 26, 2014
Community Call Facilitator Agenda (2nd Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- What are you most proud of?
- What has surprised you the most?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

November 23, 2014
Community Call Facilitator Agenda (3rd Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- What are your greatest accomplishments? What do you want to be acknowledged for?
- What tensions are you feeling in your teaching? Biggest challenges?
- What does social justice teaching mean to you? Has it changed?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

December 23, 2014
Community Call Facilitator Agenda (4th Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- How are you feeling half way through the year?
- What are you afraid of? Excited by?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

January 25, 2015
Community Call Facilitator Agenda (5th Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- What has the transition back been like?
- What support do you need now?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

February 22, 2015

Community Call Facilitator Agenda (6th Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- How would you describe your emotional wellbeing?
- How would you students' describe your emotional wellbeing?
- What are your intentions for the next month in this area?

March 25, 2015

Community Call Facilitator Agenda (7th Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- Think back to the first week of school. How have you/your perspectives on teaching changed?
- What does social justice mean to you now?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

April 25, 2015

Community Call Facilitator Agenda (8th Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- Think back to the first week of school. How have you/your perspectives on teaching changed?
- What does social justice mean to you now?
- What are your intentions for the next month?

May 24, 2015

Community Call Facilitator Agenda (9th Month of Teaching):

- Check in: What are your highs and lows?
- What have been your biggest breakthroughs in your teaching this year?
- What have you learned about yourself?
- What are your intentions for the end of the year?

Appendix C: First Round Interview Schedule

First Round of Semi-Structured Interviews
Halfway through First Year Teaching
December 2014 - January 2015

Participant Name	1st Interview Location	1st Interview Date	Teaching Position	School Location
Andrea	Oakland, CA	01/09/15	Kindergarten	Oakland, CA
Christa	Madison, WI	12/20/2014	1st Grade	Madison, WI
Cynhia	Oakland, CA	01/09/15	5th grade	Oakland, CA
Elizabeth	Milwaukee, WI	12/21/2014	Pre-k	St Paul, MN→ (transferred to Minneapolis 12/14)
Lauren	Madison, WI	12/21/2014	1st grade	Copan, Honduras
Linh	Milwaukee, WI	12/19/2014	Pre-k	Milwaukee, WI (Transferred schools within same district in 10/14)
Marissa	Chicago, IL	12/17/2014	1st grade	Chicago, IL
Mia	Aurora, IL	12/16/2014	3rd grade	Aurora, IL

Appendix D: Second Round Interview Schedule

Second Round of Semi-Structured Interviews
End of First Year Teaching
May 2015 - June 2015

Participant Name	2nd Interview Tentative Location	2nd Interview Tentative Date	Teaching Position	School Location
Andrea	Oakland, CA	June, 2015	Kindergarten	Oakland, CA
Christa	Madison, WI	June, 2015	1st Grade	Madison, WI
Cynhia	Oakland, CA	June, 2015	5th grade	Oakland, CA
Elizabeth	Milwaukee, WI	June, 2015	Pre-k	St Paul, MN→ (transferred to Minneapolis 12/14)
Lauren	Copan, Honduras	May, 2015	1st grade	Copan, Honduras
Linh	Milwaukee, WI	June, 2015	Pre-k	Milwaukee, WI (Transferred schools within same district in 10/14)
Marissa	Chicago, IL	June, 2015	1st grade	Chicago, IL
Mia	Aurora, IL	June, 2015	3rd grade	Aurora, IL

Appendix E: First Round Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Halfway through First Year Teaching
December 2014 - January 2015

- Tell me about yourself
    - Schooling experience
    - Family background
- Why did you choose to come into teaching?
- What does being a good teacher mean to you?
- Tell me about your first year teaching thus far.
    - What has surprised you?
    - What has excited you?
    - What has challenged you?
    - What has made you proud?
- What was the transition from teacher education to teaching like?
    - What have you taken up?
    - What would you change?
- What ongoing tensions and challenges are you experiencing?
- What does social justice teaching mean to you?
    - Has this changed?
- When thinking back to teacher education, is this what you imagined your first year teaching would be like?
- How has the reflective process impacted your teaching?
- Why did you choose to be a part of the community of practice?
- Where do you see yourself being at the end of the year? Where do you hope? 3 years 5 years?
- Anything else you would like to share?

Appendix F: Second Round Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

End of First Year Teaching
May 2015 – June 2015

- How are you feeling now that you are finished with your first year of teaching?
- Tell me about what you learned during your first year in the classroom this year.
    - What did you learn about yourself?
    - What did you learn about teaching?
    - What did you learn about your students?
    - What did you learn about the education system and society?
- How has teaching changed you?
    - How have your students changed you?
    - How have you grown?
    - How do you still hope to grow?
- What does being a good teacher mean to you? Has this changed?
- Reflect on specific moments/aspects of your teaching experience.
    - What has surprised you?
    - What has excited you?
    - What has challenged you?
    - What has made you most proud?
- What was your emotional well being like throughout the year?
    - What did you do to take care of your well being?
    - What did you NOT do?
    - How did this impact your teaching/students/personal life?
- What was the transition from teacher education to teaching like?
    - What ideas have you (have you not) taken up in practice?
    - How was this transition similar to/different from what you expected?
- What does social justice teaching mean to you now?
    - Has this changed overtime?
- What were the greatest tensions/challenges you (and your students) faced?
    - Do you see possible solutions to these problems?
- What aspects of teacher education did/did not prepare you for the realities of teaching (i.e.: courses, practicum, student teaching, the program in general)?
    - If you could do teacher education all over again, what would you do the same/differently?
- Reflecting on your experience, what recommendations/advice would you give to:
    - Pre-service teachers entering into teacher education
    - Leaders running/developing the teacher education program
    - Course Instructors
    - Cooperating Teachers
    - People deciding whether or not to enter into the teaching profession?
    - Yourself, before teacher education? During your transition into teaching?
- What has your experience as a member of this community of practice been like for you?

- How has this reflective journey impacted you personally/your teaching/the world?
- What came out of your participation in this community of practice that you least expected/are most excited about?
- What implications do you think this year-long inquiry might have on:
    - Your Teaching?
    - Teacher Education?
    - The system?
- Where do you see yourself heading now that the year is over? Where do you hope to be in a year? 3 years 5 years?
- Anything else you would like to share?

Appendix G: Codes for Analysis

I generated a priori codes during of the first round of analysis, which included first-round interviews, monthly community call transcriptions, as well as all the reflections I collected and conversations I had with participants since August 2014. This list of codes also includes some grounded cods, which I will be adding throughout the iterative analysis process to help me answer my main research question and sub-research questions (these codes were generated before I expanded my research questions to include the topic of teacher well-being).

Main Research Question: How do teachers take up ideas about social justice in their transition from teacher education into the classroom?

- *How were they introduced to these ideas before teaching? *(*Sub-research question)*
  - **(EDEX)** Education experience
  - **(FAMB)** Family Background
  - **(TE)** Teacher Education
  - **(PST)** Practicum/Student Teaching

- Transition from teacher education into teaching
  - **(TRAN)** Transition
  - **(IDEN**) Identity -- pre-service to in-service teacher
  - **(KIDS)** Descriptions/demographics of students
  - **(RESOURCES) –** availability of Resources

- *How do they make meaning of these ideas in actual practice, and how do these meanings change over time? *(*Sub-research question)*
  - **(DEF)** Defining Social Justice
  - **(SJ-teaching)** – issues of social justice (injustice) in the classroom
  - **(SJ-society) –** institutional issues of injustice
  - **(CULT-School)** – school culture
  - **(CULT-classroom)** – school culture
  - **(STRAT-teaching)** Strategies used *do* social justice teaching (working/not working)
  - **(STRAT-school/com)** Strategies used *foster* social justice at school/community level (working/not working)
  - **(STRAT- Critical Lit)** Critical Literacy
  - **(RACE)** race issues
  - **(CLASS)** class issues
  - **(MIND)** Behavior/Emotional well being/mindfulness
  - **(SURP)** What are they surprised by?
  - **(FEAR**) What are their fears?

    - **(PRIDE)** What are they proud of?

- What tensions/challenges do they experience in their transition into teaching?
    - **(TE vs. T)** Teacher education vs. realities of teaching
    - **(RES vs. COMP**) Resistance vs. compliance (in regards to what is imposed upon them)
    - **(REL-Kids)** Relationships/Tensions with students
    - **(REL-Teac)** Relationships/Tensions with school teachers
    - **(REL-Adm.)** Relationships/Tensions with administration
    - **(REL-Com)** Relationships/Tensions with participants/me (i.e.: community calls)
    - **(TENS-New)** Novices vs. experts (negotiating roles)
    - **(TENS-Other)** other tensions
    - **(E vs. E)** Equity vs. equality – approach to teaching

- *Multicultural Education as Transformative Education (Theory): *How do the individual and collective experiences transform teachers' identities, and how does their conscious awareness of these transformations open up possibilities for themselves, their teaching, and society? *(Sub-research question)*
    - **(IDENTITY)** – Identity Development
    - **(TRAN-SELF)** – Transformation of self
    - **(TRAN-TEACH)** – Transformation of teaching
    - **(TRAN-SOCIETY)** – transformation of society

- *What changes to teacher education and professional development would these teachers recommend? (**Sub-research question)*
    - **(RECS)** Recommendations to change teacher education
    - **(EXPECT)** – expectations – looking back from teacher education, is this what they expected?

- *What are some of the long-term outcomes of these collective experiences? (*What are some of the local and global implications that arise from this community of practice?) *(*Sub-research question)*
    - **(COM)** – Impact of community/close relationships with me/teachers
    - **(MENTOR**) – Impact of mentorship
    - **(P-REFL**) – Impact of personal reflection
    - **(C-REFL)** – impact of collective reflection
    - **(YOGA)** – yoga/mindfulness
    - **(FUTURE**) – hopes/intentions/for future

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