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## Preparing Teachers for Social Justice Advocacy

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Preparing teacher candidates for social justice advocacy in a graduate action research course:

*Am I walking my talk?*

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore students' perceptions of how the curriculum and teaching strategies in a graduate action research course that incorporated a social justice education approach prepared them for social justice advocacy. Ten practicing and prospective teachers were interviewed and class documents analyzed. Findings indicate that conducting AR that was meaningful and relevant to their lives, critically reflecting on their practice, learning about tools and a process for change, and being involved in a collaborative, participatory, and supportive classroom community were key factors in preparing teacher candidates for social justice advocacy. The findings reflect the pedagogy used in the course. However, students did not indicate that learning about issues of access, equity, power and privilege as key factors in preparing them for social justice advocacy. Implications for teaching action research are discussed.

### Introduction

Due to ongoing social inequity in schools (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003) and an increase of ethnic and linguistic diversity among the public school student population (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), more and more teacher preparation programs have focused on preparing teacher candidates to become advocates for social justice (Dover, 2009). Social justice advocates know their subject matter, are responsive to the needs of their student population, hold high expectations for students, possess the ability to critically analyze the ways in which structural inequality is reproduced through schools and schooling, and implement strategies individually and collectively to create equitable classrooms for all students regardless of their social standing in society (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In other words, they are excellent teachers and change agents. To prepare teacher candidates to become social justice advocates, teacher educators have to critically reflect on their curriculum and teaching strategies to examine whether they are “acting on their beliefs” about diversity and social justice (Gay, 2010, p.1). In this paper I examine teacher candidates perceptions of how their experiences in an action research, using a critical approach, promoted their readiness for social justice advocacy. I contend infusing social justice education (SJE) into action research (AR) curriculum and incorporating social justice pedagogy into the classroom can prepare teacher candidates to become advocates for social justice and advance the emancipatory goals of this form of inquiry.

I am an African American woman and teacher educator at a predominantly white institution. One of the student learning outcomes for our teacher preparation program is, *candidates will become reflective practitioners and act as change agents for equity and social justice through education*<sup>i</sup>. Meeting this goal is a challenge because many of the students where I teach are from primarily dominant groups (e.g., White, upper class, Christian) who tend to lack

experience with diverse social groups, have limited understanding of classism, racism and other forms of oppression, feel uncomfortable discussing inequality in schools and hold expectations that reflect deficit-thinking about historically marginalized groups (Sleeter, 2008). I teach a graduate level AR course. AR is an advocacy-based approach to inquiry that is participatory and democratic and allows prospective and practicing teachers to study their own practice and implement change (Stringer, 2008). Social justice and equity are fundamental objectives of AR practice (Price, 2001). I believe AR can help teacher candidates become reflective practitioners and learn to take actions to promote equity in schools because it provides teacher candidates with a process to “examine their own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and data gathering and work for social justice by using inquiry to ensure educational opportunity, access, and equity for all students” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.40). However, some scholars argue that AR has “fallen short in advancing social justice and emancipatory change” as some teacher education programs use AR primarily “as a technical tool to facilitate the use of particular teaching techniques” (Kinsler, 2010, p.172).

I am also a social justice educator and contend SJE to be an effective approach to promote the emancipatory goal of AR. SJE is the “conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action” (Carlisle, Jackson, & Dover, 2006, p.57). SJE provides teacher candidates with the tools to examine and recognize inequality in schools while AR gives teacher candidates a process to confront and challenge social injustice. Through inquiry teachers can reflect on their practice and take actions to transform structures and practices in schools that can interfere with students’ ability to be successful academically.

### **Social Justice Education**

Social justice education examines the impact of power, privilege, and social oppression on social groups and promotes social and political action to gain equity for all citizens (Picower, 2012). Culturally relevant teaching, critical pedagogy, and multicultural education are examples of social justice education (Dover, 2009). The primary goal of SJE is to prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to confront social inequality in society and promote equity within their sphere of influence (Adams, 2010). In this case, the goals are preparing teacher candidates to recognize and respond to social inequality within and outside their classrooms and incorporate a critical approach into their own teaching to increase equity among social groups (Picower, 2012).

Social justice educators use content that examines multiple forms of oppression to increase students' sociocultural awareness (Adams, 2010; Picower, 2012). In addition, the focus of social change is examined at individual, cultural, and institutional levels in society (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007). Social justice pedagogy is "collaborative, democratic, participatory, and inclusive" (Adams, 2010, p.1036) to create equitable classrooms that show students care and respect (Picower, 2012). In addition, social justice educators use responsive teaching methods that affirm and respect students' different ways of knowing (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Students' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge is used to design instruction to illustrate the value of what they bring into the classroom (Gay, 2002). Social justice educators hold high expectations for students and engage them in the process of knowledge construction to challenge deficit thinking about marginalized groups (Picower, 2012).

I contend that action research can be a form of SJE when it includes more than the technical and practical aspects of teaching and becomes an approach that promotes social justice

and equity in schools and schooling (Noffke, 1997). Brydon-Miller & Maguire (2003) argue that action research has been “threatened externally by the increased depoliticization of action research as a tool for education problem-solving” instead of a process for confronting and challenging oppression (p. 82). Critical action research, on the other hand, examines sociocultural factors that affect schooling, promotes democratic classrooms, encourages critical reflection and critique of structural inequality, and advocates social change (Manfra, 2009). Therefore, I argue for SJE in AR courses as a way to regain the emancipatory goals of this form of inquiry to prepare teacher candidates for social justice advocacy within and beyond their classrooms.

### **Relevant Studies**

The number of studies that examine the pedagogy in AR courses is limited (Grossman, 2005). However, several studies have examined how AR courses with a critical approach have influenced teacher candidates change agency as well as the pedagogical implications of this process. For example, Zeichner & Gore (1991) incorporated a social-reconstructionist approach in an AR course and found that most students conducted projects that did not examine moral and political issues related to schooling. Valli & Price (2000) described their approach as constructivist, democratic, and inclusive and found that it is equally important to prepare students for both self-directed (i.e. challenging one’s own bias) and other-directed change (i.e., schools) as a teaching strategy to help students develop greater understanding of the change process. Price (2001) investigated how prospective teachers enrolled in an action research course made meaning of teaching, inquiry, and educational change. Democracy and social justice in the classroom was a focus in the course. Teacher candidates showed greater commitment toward educational change and understanding of how social justice can be addressed in schools and

schooling. Price & Valli (2005) explored the tensions of preparing teacher candidates for social justice work in an action research course and found that the following could play a key role in teacher candidates change agency development: the focus of change (micro-level and macro-level), the importance of reflection and action in the change process, supporting and challenging students' to select a relevant course of inquiry that reflects the goals of social justice, encouraging "reasoned" passion, and regulation and emancipation.

Building on studies of action research pedagogy, I provide a framework for social justice education and ask students directly how an action research course that incorporates SJE prepared them to become advocates for social justice. In particular, I explore the key experiences in an AR course that promoted students' readiness for social justice advocacy. The findings from this study can bring to light the need for issues of power and privilege and oppression in action research curriculum for teacher educators who want to guide students into inquiry that promote social change.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

This paper draws on teacher candidates' experiences in an AR course required for students in our masters degree program for experienced teachers and community educators. The 15-week course has an enrollment of six to eight students and is part of a six-credit integrative inquiry/advocacy sequence that teacher candidates' take prior to their capstone. I have taught AR since 2008 and the primary goal of the course is for teacher candidates and community educators to *gain knowledge and competence in designing and implementing socially responsible research and advocacy projects with and for students and community members<sup>ii</sup>*.



There is one textbook required (*Action Research in Education*, Stringer, 2008) and several articles that illustrate AR in a variety of contexts and describe its emancipatory goals. Many of the projects described in the readings focus on social justice issues such as developing inclusive practices in schools, youth empowerment, sexual harassment, and improving reading and communication between schools and the community. The goal here is to increase students' sociocultural consciousness and help them understand why change is necessary. The assignments are cumulative (introduction to research paper, literature review paper, conducting research, action research report, and poster session) and relevant to their studies<sup>iii</sup>. In addition, students are required to facilitate one class discussion as a team based on assigned reading. This builds on students experience as educators and allows them to demonstrate their own learning as well as take the lead in helping other students deepen their understanding of action research and social justice issues. Early on in the semester I do an exercise<sup>iv</sup> with students to help them make meaning of social justice and reflect on how their projects pursue this goal. Students' research topics are self-selected and they can work alone or with a partner to conduct their inquiry.

In addition, to facilitate a significant aspect of AR, "talk and work with others engaged in the work of teaching all children" (Price, 2001, p. 51), group guidelines are designed on the first day of class to create a respectful and safe learning community. Providing feedback is a key component of the course. For example, students read their introduction to research papers aloud during class time. Afterward, each person (including myself) gives feedback. Developing group norms are necessary for this process to be effective. In addition, a weekly "check-in" is conducted at the beginning of every class to provide students with time to ask for help from the group with an issue that arose during the inquiry process. Class discussions occurred in small and whole groups and focus on assigned readings and the research process primarily. Reflective

questions are given to students to guide their reading and prepare them for class discussions.

Students practice data collection and analysis techniques (e.g. interviewing, coding) during class time as well. Lectures are given at the end of class sessions to reiterate key information and address issues raised during class discussions.

### **Participants**

This study took place at a Jesuit institution in the northeast. The 10<sup>v</sup> teacher candidates (See Table 1) who agreed to participate in this study were enrolled in the AR course during spring 2010 or 2011. There were six females and one male who identified as white and one Asian female, one Hispanic female and one female who identified as “other.” The majority of the students were in their twenties. However, two were in their thirties and one in their fifties. Five were elementary school teachers; three were middle school and one high school. One student was unemployed. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews in fall 2011. The questions focused on different aspects of the course (e.g., Describe your experience completing the assignments?) and how each influenced their readiness for social justice advocacy (How did the course prepare you to become an advocate for social justice?). To triangulate my data, I analyzed course evaluations, students final reports, the syllabi, teacher class notes, course readings, and lesson plans to deepen my understanding of how the curriculum and teaching strategies may have influenced students overall experiences in the course. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. All were sent to students for review before excerpts were included in this paper. I used a grounded theory approach for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used analytic memos, open coding, and a constant comparison method to reduce and organize the data, develop codes, and generate

themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process allowed me to be reflective about patterns and contradictions that emerged from students' responses. In addition, I used peer reviewers to examine and critique the themes used in this paper.

### **Findings**

The process of engaging in AR, combined with the community of the AR course, contributed most significantly to students' readiness for SJ advocacy. Their responses indicated that the AR project was meaningful and relevant to their lives; helped them to become reflective about their teaching practices; and provided them with a process for change. In addition, teacher candidates described the classroom community as collaborative, participatory, and provided them with support throughout the process. These findings were reflective of the pedagogy used in the course. I will first discuss how conducting AR project promoted their readiness for social justice advocacy and then the classroom community.

#### **Meaningful and relevant inquiry**

Teacher candidates' responses highlight the importance of conducting action research that is meaningful and relevant on a microlevel (personal or professional) or a macrolevel (institutional or societal) when describing factors that prepared them for social justice advocacy. For example, one student wrote the following statement in their course evaluation, "We had the opportunity to pursue something for which we have passion." Social justice educators believe encouraging students to connect their personal experiences to macro-level social issues may increase their understanding of the structural inequality (Kumashiro, 2004). For example, Yolanda, who explored parents' (whose second language was English) understanding of standardized testing, described what led to her research topic:

For me it was what I went through when I was in school. I figured that if I was personally going through the school system and didn't know what the DRA (developmental reading assessment) was then my parents probably knew less and considering I have a younger brother who is falling in this category of a Hispanic with lower grades I thought he wasn't the only one. It was more meaningful to me on a personal level, this is my community, this is my family, this is my background it was my personal experience.

Another student simply stated in the course evaluation that "It related with my job. I can walk out of this course and try something new in my class after doing the research." Both responses are examples of relevance on a microlevel. The following statement illustrates relevance at a macrolevel, Rose, who examined inequitable school funding in her school district, described why she selected her topic:

I discovered something I was interested in that was on the cusp of movement. It is people looking at spending on a student basis or a school basis. It's a small area of financial education reform. It's very important and starting to take off. It was gratifying to find something that's meaningful and I can be a part of it.

Allowing teacher candidates to select research topics that are meaningful and relevant to their lived experiences and helping them connect the topics to broader social issues may help teacher candidates gain a greater understanding of the system of oppression (Kumashiro, 2004; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). This could lead to candidates developing the ability to identify forms of oppression in schools, increase their willingness to take the actions necessary to make educational or societal change, and feel prepared to become advocates because it is an issue they have passion for and is meaningful to their lived experiences personally and professionally

(Author, in press). However, it is critical that teacher candidates learn to connect the personal with the institutional for this to take place (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

### **Reflective practice**

Teacher candidates' responses indicated that critically reflecting on their practice was a factor in preparing them for social justice advocacy. This is necessary for candidates to increase their "consciousness" or awareness of how their practice and the institution may reproduce inequity (Howard & Aleman, 2008). To advocate for social justice, candidates must first be able to determine whether their practice promotes or hinders equity in schools or schooling. For example, one student wrote in the course evaluation that conducting action research "helped me to reflect on my teaching practices." Howard & Aleman (2008) argue that a key element of teacher capacity is candidates' ability to "examine their own ideas and how each influences" what they do in the classroom (p.166). Some scholars view critical reflection "as a practice for social justice" (Grant & Agosto, 2008) because it can help teachers increase their awareness about the effectiveness of their practice and make changes when necessary (Howard & Aleman, 2008).

In the first example, Cathy described how exploring English language learners' experiences in the regular education classroom, increased her awareness about including students voices in the classroom:

It just opened my eyes to how much they wanted to share with me their opinions about things. I had not realized how important it was for their voice to be heard about some of these other things that maybe I didn't think were important to them. They were just so excited to share what they thought with me. I had never really thought that nine-year-olds

were overly interested in gender [differences in the classroom] but it turns out that they were very excited to share what they thought about it.

In the following example, Marie, who collaborated with Yolanda, discussed how conducting research increased her awareness about the importance of communication and the challenges bilingual families face when English is not their first language:

I feel that a lot of the bilingual families are put on the back burner because we can't communicate with them directly. And they are left there. These are parents that try hard and work hard with their kids. And through the interviews we did, we saw just how hard they do try. Because of the language barrier that doesn't always come across. We sit there in school and blame our low results on the families "don't do enough," well they try and it's good to see that they try and there are limitations because of language but it's not something we should judge them about.

In the next example Diane described how conducting research on gender differences in homework completion was the vehicle that helped her reflect on and change her practice:

Overall, the project ended up changing the way that I practice in my own classroom, so it was extremely beneficial to me. I was having a problem in class with kids not doing homework, and I had this idea that boys were not doing homework, and girls were, and why, and what was going on... It turns out it had nothing to do with that, it was me... I feel like now I'm doing something better for my students and trying to make it so that everybody has, no matter what gender or race or ability level they are, to make it more likely that they will succeed with the class... because a lot of the stuff that I read is that teachers feel so much pressure to get so much curriculum in that they end up assigning

what should have been done in class for homework. And I thought, “Aha. Yes, I do that” because you feel like there’s a vast amount of stuff that you just have to get through.

In the last example, Holly believes that social justice advocacy should not be an explicit goal of the AR course, but believes that reflecting on social justice issues is necessary at times. She collaborated with Diane on examining gender differences in homework completion and stated:

There is a lot of interesting things to look into with your students, not just [social justice issues], but I think it’s really important to be conscious of that because it skews these kids. We have ten thousand other things, so reflection time is few and far between, but I do like that [AR] gets you thinking about a lot of things.

Once again, critical reflection can help teacher candidates increase their self-awareness about their practice and determine how it promotes equity. To be an advocate for social justice candidates must become critically reflective to recognize and respond to policies and practices that may interfere with students’ ability to be success academically. Recognition of social oppression in our daily environment is precursor to taking action (Adams & Marchesani, 1997).

### **Process and tools for change**

It is critical for teacher educators to provide candidates with the tools for change and teach them the change process if we want them to believe in the possibilities of social and educational change (Hackman, 2005). Teacher candidates’ responses indicated that learning about the change process and/or tools for change prepared them for social justice advocacy. For example, complex sources of information can be a tool for educational change because it can provide teacher candidates with multiple perspectives on their topic and develop their critical thinking skills to weigh the effectiveness of various educational approaches (Hackman, 2005). Anne describes

how the literature review broadened her perspective about interventions in the classroom and prepared her for social justice advocacy:

I was able to really take a look at kids who had special needs and find research to support [full inclusion] and found research that went in a different direction than I would have thought of. And that was exciting because I know with the literature review it gave me ideas that I never even thought of! And that also was something new, and I liked that a lot, because it made me look at things from a different perspective. There are so many different layers. I felt that's what the literature review gave us. I think it was the most beneficial in [preparing me to advocate for social justice].

In the following example, Lori explored English teachers' perception of curriculum planning and curriculum standards and discussed how conducting research helped her learn the process of change and feel more prepared for social justice advocacy:

I think it's been beneficial as far as what to avoid, what to do in some sort of tough bind in that professional circle. I think it's shown me realistic options and steps to take and how to be approachable and how to approach. I think to see something through, I have to gather more information and [be] more aware of the process of speaking out, [and] garnering interest. I can't go in guns blazing and expect immediate change. So I think it has taught me to reign in that focus; that was one of the challenges. 'What is my question, what is the phrasing, how can I make this relevant and applicable to lots of colleagues? Seeing something that is realistic and that has a real hope for change.

In the last example, Marie discussed how learning to do a literature review and conducting research provided her with tools for social justice advocacy:



Now when I need to look something up and I need something that's research based for my school, [when] we want to implement something in our building, I know how to find that stuff and know what to look for. It's nice. We are a compact school, so it's supposed to be teacher driven decision-making. We do a lot of research for school now to bring in new programs. It's so much easier now...I was really glad that it wasn't boring old research. You feel like you achieve something at the end. I can do this [in my own school] because I have been through the process. With a [research] proposal you have these grand ideas and they are not necessarily realistic because you don't have to implement them. I am glad we did the project. We had something tangible at the end.

To help teacher candidates counteract feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment about inequity in schools, it is necessary to teach them the process of change and discuss myriad tools to enact change (Hackman, 2005). This information may help candidates feel more prepared to advocate for social justice and apply action strategies in their classrooms and schools.

### **The Classroom Community.**

Teacher candidates described the classroom community as participatory, collaborative, and supportive and discussed how the learning community contributed to their preparation for social justice advocacy. To an advocate for social justice taking individual action is important. However, it is critical for teacher candidates to move beyond "individual heroism" to collaborative action to enact change beyond the walls of their classrooms (Grant & Agosto, 2008). Social justice educators see the classroom as a safe "laboratory for democratic social practice" (Adams, 2007, p. 31) where teacher candidates can "engage in a joint enterprise to develop a whole repertoire of activities, common stories, and ways of speaking and acting for social justice" (Grant & Agosto, 2008, p.189). I encourage teacher candidates to engage in

dialogue about their projects so that others can provide support while they engage in educational change, but also to critique one another and provide alternatives to enact change—illustrating a form of collaborative action. This approach can be the first step toward helping teacher candidates practice social justice work and develop allies who can support them as they attempt educational change. In addition, this approach may encourage candidates to incorporate similar strategies in their classrooms where students become a community of learners that engage in critical inquiry (Howard & Aleman, 2008).

*Collaborative.*

When asked what most contributed to their learning, one candidate wrote, [the] “collaborative nature—having the entire class involved in everyone’s research made my project much more meaningful.” In the next example, Tony, who explored how pop culture influences middle school students’ view of themselves, described how the collaborative nature of the community prepared him for social justice advocacy:

What I really liked was when we read our papers aloud. [It was] nerve-wracking, but was just great because you read aloud and you don’t get one view from the professor, you get 7 other views. Even just reading the paper out loud, you see things. I think we established a good relationship. We were respectful to each other, we bounced ideas off each other, we worked together, and we were enthusiastic about each other’s projects. We were all into each other’s projects and it flowed very well. It never bothered me once that I was the only guy.

*Supportive.*

Inid, who explored how high school aged students experience bullying through technology, discussed how the supportive nature of the community prepared her for social justice advocacy:

We were a good community of support for each other and I think ultimately that's probably most of the success that our class had because we were able to support each other and say, "Oh too bad, but have you tried this, and maybe next week you can try this", and so I think we had a great group.

Rose described her experience in the course as "social justice in practice." She discussed how it prepared her for social justice advocacy in the following example:

I believe very much it was the interaction among all of us—it completely amplified the concept of being part of change, of doing change. We cohered as a group. Everyone supported one another if anyone of us was a little more tentative about something. If you are going to learn how to participate in social justice, it would be antithetical to be less than tolerate and supportive of your compeers. It was very much, "we are all in this together." It was interactive and emotionally collaborative. The course itself was social justice in practice as we became or tried to become social justice practitioners. The starting part for that was practicing that in the classroom among ourselves.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The goal of this inquiry was to explore teacher candidate's experiences in an action research course that incorporated a social justice education approach to gain a greater understanding of how their experiences in the course helped to prepare them for social justice advocacy. Conducting AR that was meaningful and relevant to their lives, critically reflecting on their practice, learning about tools and a process for change, and being involved in a collaborative, participatory, and supportive classroom community were identified as key factors in preparing teacher candidates to become social justice advocates. These findings reflect social justice pedagogy. There may be several reasons for these findings.

First, all of the candidates provided responses that illustrated the importance of selecting a research topic that was meaningful and relevant to them personally. According to Joplin (1995) all knowing begins with students' personal connection with a topic. A component of social justice pedagogy is to acknowledge and validate students lived experiences in the classroom (Adams, 2007). The pedagogical implication is that teacher educators must help teacher candidates connect their lived experiences (personal experiences, classroom, community) to broader social issues of power and privilege and access and equity in schools (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002), to help them to understand the need for an emancipatory goal for their research and commit to social justice advocacy. However, this raises the tensions of support versus challenge and passion versus reason when teaching action research courses (Valli & Price, 2005). As a social justice educator, I also struggle with both when teaching AR courses. I want to support students' passions when selecting a research topic that is relevant to their practice, but also remind them of the emancipatory goals of AR. However, this is a challenge if their passion focuses primarily on the technical and practical aspects of teaching. Kinsler (2010) criticizes much of the work in teacher education programs for advancing theory over the emancipatory goals of AR. In addition, Zeichner & Gore (1995) argue that the goal of pedagogy in teacher education programs has been to regulate students more than promote emancipatory values. I plan to further examine how to support and challenge students without causing increased resistance toward social justice issues in the classroom especially in situations where the faculty is a person of color and the students are primarily white.

Second, Valli and Price (2000) argue that praxis (i.e. reflection and action) can be used as a teaching strategy to help students develop greater understanding of the change process and the various ways they can take action in schools and beyond. Another component of social justice

pedagogy is using reflection to help students increase their self-awareness during the learning process (Adams, 2007). Teacher candidates provided responses that indicated AR helped them become reflective and provided them with a process for change. The process of reflection through AR can help teachers and teacher candidates change their roles from being receivers of knowledge who implement what educational “scholars” suggest to creators of knowledge who theorize and make effective decisions about their practice (Manfra, 2009). AR allows teachers to not only critically reflect on their own practice, they also become active in the process of change (Picower, 2012). As Marie stated, “with a proposal you have these grand ideas...we were involved, the community was involved, we had something tangible in the end.” Hackman argues (2005) that it is harmful to teach students about social inequality in schools and society without providing them with the tools and a process to enact change. In addition, I believe that it is necessary to discuss the risks and challenges, as well as the benefits and successes of implementing strategies for social change to prepare teacher candidates for the realities of social justice work. The pedagogical implication is that discussing the risks and challenges of enacting change, as Rose said, “It can be exhausting,” could discourage teacher candidates and decrease the likelihood of them participating in social action. In my experience this tension is not addressed enough when many of the teachers and teacher candidates in our program profess feeling powerless to create change in schools. I would add this tension, risks versus rewards, to Valli and Price’s (2005) framework for teacher educators to consider when teaching AR courses with an emancipatory goal.

Third, all of the students described the classroom environment as collaborative, participatory, and supportive. This reflects social justice pedagogy and its social justice goals (Adams, 2010; Picower, 2012). A third component of social justice pedagogy is focusing on

intergroup interactions in the classroom (Adams, 2007). Building community in the classroom can create a feeling of “we are all in this together” when examining social justice issues (hooks, 1994). Through dialogue teacher candidates can broaden their perspectives and discuss strategies to promote equity in schools (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). I encourage candidates to become a community of learners where they can safely discuss the rewards and risks of enacting change and challenge one another to consider different perspectives. In addition, as Rose stated, it allowed them to practice the goals of social justice amongst themselves as they become social justice workers. The pedagogical implication for social justice educators is that we have to name our approach and explain to candidates the goals of social justice pedagogy. While students were able to provide responses that reflected the approach used in the course, I plan to be more explicit about how the approach can prepare them for advocacy in their own classrooms

There are several limitations for this study. First, the length of time between students’ course enrollment and the interviews may have affected their ability to reflect on their experiences accurately. I recommend future studies interview students’ within a semester of course completion. A second limitation is that five out of the ten students who participated in this study were enrolled in the multicultural education course I teach prior to taking the AR course. I incorporate social justice education approach as well and it may have influenced their responses. I recommend future studies consider using a comparison course that uses a different pedagogical approach to compare and contrast students’ responses. Third, while I did use peer reviewers throughout the process, my insider experience could have interfered with my ability to see nuances in the data during analysis.

This inquiry is the first step in understanding how a social justice education approach in an AR course can prepare students for social justice advocacy. The findings indicate that I am

“walking my talk” when teaching action research, however, it is necessary to continue investigating how teachers and candidates develop change agency and the role this approach plays in this process since there is a paucity of literature exploring pedagogy in action research courses. In addition, I believe it is necessary for teacher educators to examine concepts of power and privilege and social inequality, in schools and beyond, if we want practicing and prospective teachers to examine these issues when conducting action research. In that case action research becomes a form of social justice education with the possibility of furthering the emancipatory goal of action research.

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Table 1

## Participant Demographic Information

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Grade Taught</b>
Yolanda	Female	Hispanic	Middle School
Rose <sup>vi</sup>	Female	Caucasian	
Inid	Female	Asian	High School
Cathy	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Marie	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Diane	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Holly	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Anne	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Tony	Male	Caucasian	Middle School
Lori	Female	Caucasian	Middle School

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<sup>i</sup>The outcome statement is from an unpublished departmental document.

<sup>ii</sup>The course description is from the college catalog.

<sup>iii</sup>In 2008 and 2009 students were required to complete an action research proposal only. Based on student feedback, students are now required to conduct action research based on an educational issue of their choice. In addition, in Spring 2011 students could work in a team or alone on their project whereas students in Spring 2010 were required to work in teams.

<sup>iv</sup> This an activity where students must “match” different definitions of social justice with the outcomes in society it promotes and how it looks in practice and research. Contact the author for a copy.

<sup>v</sup> There were 7 students enrolled in both the 2010 and 2011 sections of the course. I was unable to reach three students and one was unable to participate due to family constraints.

<sup>vi</sup>This student was unemployed during data collection.