Educating for Social Justice: Perspectives from Library and Information Science and Collaboration with K-12 Social Studies Educators

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Library and Information Science (LIS) as a discipline is guided by core values that emphasize equal access to information, freedom of expression, democracy, and education. Importantly, diversity and social responsibility are specifically called out as foundations of the profession (American Library Association, 2004). Following from this, there has been a focus in LIS on educating librarians from a social justice perspective. In this essay we will discuss some of the strategies we use for training librarians to practice librarianship using a social justice framework as a way to help social studies teachers and other educators critically think through their role in educating for social justice in their classrooms. Some areas of particular transference from LIS to K-12 educators that we focus on include locating classroom technologies as sites of power and privilege, prioritizing print and digital materials representative of culturally diverse populations and relevant contexts, and expanding the notion of literacy to include multiple literacies. These strategies lay a foundation for a critically-oriented classroom as a step towards teaching for social justice, and provide opportunities for collaboration between social studies educators and librarians.

Social Justice Perspectives in LIS Education

In "Public Libraries and Social Justice" (2010) Pateman and Vincent locate social justice as a response to social exclusion, or the structural disenfranchisement of groups of people from social, economic, and cultural resources, creating patterns of disadvantage that can be reproduced generationally. They cite the library as an institution that has historically been implicated in the reproduction of social exclusion by reflecting the needs and interests of dominant culture. As an intervention to this structure, they suggest that librarians focus on targeted, needs-based services that are co-produced with the communities they serve. To do this, they recommend that librarians embrace diversity as they strive for equality, tailoring, rather than homogenizing, services and approaches. In this vein, we identify cultural competency, diversity, multiculturalism, and equality as foundational concepts for social justice work that can be extended through targeted, justice-oriented curricular collaborations between social studies educators and librarians (school media specialists and/or public librarians).

Montiel-Overall (2009) suggests a model for fostering cultural competence among librarians that examines the intersection of interpersonal communication, environmental factors, and cognitive understanding. We believe this model lays the foundation for librarians being open to social justice learning collaborations and is equally pertinent for social studies teachers and other educators. Cultural competence is understood to be the awareness of one's own culture and the contributions of other cultures, the ability to interact with other individuals from diverse cultures, and an understanding of how cultures are integrated together within our larger society (Montiel-Overall, 2009). For social justice work to occur, both librarians and social studies teachers must develop their own cultural competence, or be on the road to doing so, before they can plan collaborative lessons that promote cultural competence among students. Since environmental factors, lived experiences, and individualized perspectives shape our understanding and acceptance of the world, the journey to full cultural competence is a unique experience. It is positively influenced by opportunities to interact with diverse

cultures through hands-on activities, print and digital media, and educational programs that facilitate intercultural connections.

Cultural competency must be embedded in critiques of structural power in order to connect individual experiences and identity formation to systems of oppression and domination. Critical pedagogy (Friere, 2001; hooks, 1994) perspectives offer intersectional frameworks for interrogating classroom/libraries as hegemonic sites of power. These frameworks require educators and librarians to "unlearn" and question the assumptions of their training, including the ways in which diversity initiatives are constructed and employed. Ahmed (2012) argues that institutionalized diversity projects may actually further entrench whiteness by placing efforts on the symbolic commitment to diversity without addressing necessary structural changes. Similarly, scholars like Pawley (2006) and Honma (2005) point out that within LIS, "multiculturalism" and "diversity" often take on celebratory tones of difference, without specifically calling out racism and white supremacy as the structural system of oppression. The same can occur when K-12 educators attempt to include cultural diversity in the curriculum, through a "tourist approach" which highlights the foods, fashion, festivals, folklore, and famous people from a culture rather than exploring the lived experiences of individuals from a particular cultural group. It is necessary for librarians as well as social studies teachers to locate white supremacy and features of whiteness (as well as other forms of primary cultural dominance) as a guiding benchmark of the status quo that guides formal structures as well as informal norms, practices, and customs. Disrupting this requires active engagement with subjectivity, positionality, and a constant interrogation about the hidden assumptions of pedagogical paradigms.

Classroom technologies as sites and structures of power

Just as Freire's (2001) critical pedagogy demands that both social studies teachers and students become aware of the politics that structure their education as a way to understand their oppression and its relationship to the institution, so do critical technology perspectives demand an awareness of the politics that structure, and are structured by, technological assemblages. Education for social justice must include an analysis of technological artifacts and associated practices as *ideological processes* that prioritize particular political interests and social arrangements. Social studies educators and librarians can collaboratively teach critical technology perspectives along with technology skills, applications, and literacies as key components for a justice-oriented curriculum. Situating the design, use, and meaning of common classroom technologies and practices within broader systems of power sets the stage for cultivating what Selfe and Selfe (1994) term "technology critics," in addition to technology users.

Library and classroom technologies are commonly treated as "neutral" tools in normative frameworks that emphasize applications for learning or disseminating information. This is reflected in skills-based learning and literacy programs as well as access-based interventions for achieving digital parity. While skills and access are certainly important dimensions of technology, they often elide deeper explorations of technology as both sites and structures of power. For example, the common rhetoric of the digital divide relies on deficit-based language of information "haves" and "have nots," a framing that Eubanks (2007) identifies as falling within the "distributive paradigm" of social justice. Young (2011) defines the distributive paradigm of social justice as the "morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens among society's members (p. 16)." According to Eubanks, distributive paradigms of the digital divide are narrow in their over-reliance on market-based logics, and assume digital incorporation to be beneficial, and therefore unproblematic, to homogenous users.

In fact, the redistribution of resources, and skilling up of users does not, de facto, guarantee digital or social inclusion. In their study of public libraries, schools, and the digital divide among diverse

socioeconomic communities in Philadelphia, Neuman and Celano (2012) observe how affluence and poverty contribute to disparities in information capital. The authors note that without proper guidance and instruction, technology manages to further divide social classes rather than bring them together. Similarly, Warschauer (2000) examined how technology initiatives were enacted in both an affluent and low-income school, concluding that "One school was producing scholars and the other school was producing workers. And the introduction of computers did absolutely nothing to change this dynamic; in fact, it reinforced it (p. 5)."

To echo Forst (2007), distributive paradigms of the digital divide shift questions about justice into pragmatic accounts of the distribution of goods in society without addressing the underlying questions of structural power and oppression that produce and employ said goods in the global information economy. It is precisely these unaddressed questions that social studies educators and librarians are ideally positioned to help students learn to ask as part and parcel of their technology practices: How (and where) are our technologies made? Who is involved with designing our technologies? Whose knowledge and culture is encoded into the hardware, software, and interface design? What counts as technological skill? Who decides? How are identities interpolated through technological engagement? These are examples of questions that, alongside skills acquisition, can help educators and students explore classroom technologies as sites and structures of power, connecting local experiences to global phenomena.

Lastly, a social justice framework requires acknowledging that classroom technologies are embedded with values that privilege particular users and experiences. Selfe and Selfe describe the computer interface as a "political and ideological boundary land (1994, p. 481)" that may contribute to a larger cultural system of differentiation and domination in much the same way that geopolitical borders do. Using Pratt's (1991) concept of the "contact zone," they point out that the design of computer interfaces can have exclusionary functions based on asymmetrical power relationships that reflect systems of oppression and domination. Iconography reflecting white-collar, middle class workspace (e.g. the "desktop"), English-as-default language, autocorrect tools that discipline the user according to the standardized spellings and grammar of dominant groups, and ASCII encoding systems that privilege Western characters—these are but a few examples of common features of information and communication technologies that encode hegemonic values, leaving non-privileged users at a disadvantage. Learning to recognize these features as designed and ideological, rather than natural and neutral, can help students become comfortable questioning how these technologies structure their education and broader opportunities in the world—a necessary foundation for imagining justice-oriented interventions.

Integrating critical technology perspectives into the social studies curriculum allows students to connect their own experiences with technology to broader systems of oppression. Focusing on technology as an extension of various systems of exclusion provided a powerful tool for demonstrating the immediacy of oppression on a local level. This might be beneficial to students who have difficulty identifying localized systems of oppression, and could serve to validate the lived experiences of socially marginalized students. By exploring technologies as sites and structures of power, social studies educators and librarians can help students identify structural mechanisms of technological exclusion, move away from deficit-based models of technological ability and distributive paradigms of justice, re-define notions of expertise, and become more critical users/designers of technology.

Culturally Authentic Literature and Digital Media in the Curriculum

Another opportunity in educating for social justice includes the incorporation of culturally authentic children's and young adult literature and digital media (such as digital apps, streaming educational videos, online games, and digital picture books) into learning activities. Multiple theoretical lenses have been used to explore the myriad factors influencing the cultural identity and lived experiences of children and young adults (Hallowell, 1955; Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner,1979; Cummins, 1996). These theories suggest that the print and digital media that students consume, as well as their daily encounters at home or school, within the community, or in larger society, can augment their thoughts and feelings not only towards their cultural group but diverse cultural groups around the world. Myers (2014), Bishop (1997), Fox & Short (2003), Naidoo (2014b), Park Dahlen (2013), and others also describe the importance of culturally authentic literature and digital media in the promotion of positive identity development among children and young adults and the fostering of global awareness. Collectively, this research as well as the theoretical underpinnings advocate that culturally diverse children's print and digital materials can be used to first foster cultural competence in students and then motivate them to engagement in social justice activities. Print and digital materials presenting diverse cultures serve as mirrors, windows, and road maps to a child's sociocultural world. They are mirrors reflecting the daily cultural experiences of a student or windows offering cross-cultural insight (Bishop, 1997). Moreover, these materials can also serve as a road map showcasing the accomplishment of a particular cultural group and predicting potential futures for students from that cultural group (Myers, 2014).

Simply reading a story about a diverse culture or engaging with a digital app about another country does not empower students to become advocates of social justice. Librarians and social studies educators should work together to design learning opportunities that include the use of well-chosen books and/or digital media that present an injustice relatable to students and then provide space for dialogue about how the students can realistically effect change that will make a step towards righting the injustice. Librarians have knowledge of quality children's and young adult books as well as impactful digital media to spark a conversation and empower action, while social studies teachers know how best to structure learning activities that meet learning outcomes in their subject area. The key for success is *relevancy* in materials and learning activities. If students cannot make a connection between an injustice in their own lives or broader social contexts, then it will be difficult to inspire action.

Some educators may find it useful to have a list of recommended materials that embody relevancy and have proven potential for promoting social justice with students. These lists can be shared with librarians who can then select complimentary print and digital resources to scaffold student learning. The following resources, culled by library and information science educators, present selected print and digital social justice-themed materials and curricula that can be used in K-12 classrooms.

- The International Literacy Association's Notable Books for a Global Society (http://clrsig.org/nbgs.php), Jane Addams Peace Association's Jane Addams Children's Book Award (http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/), and The Citizen Kid imprint of Kids Can Press in Canada (http://www.kidscanpress.com/series/citizenkid) are wonderful sources for recommended English-language children's and young adult books with social justice themes. The two book awards highlight print materials that were specifically created to help students think about social issues around the world. Titles receiving the awards represent diverse global cultures and myriad opportunities for social engagement. The Citizen Kid resource provides several children's picture books with lesson plans that address global human rights topics and can inspire children to action. The publisher also includes video clips and short trailers that social studies educators can use in the curriculum to extend the topic.

- The U.S. Peace Corp World Wise Schools program (http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/) provides lesson plans, streaming video, recommended speakers, and teaching ideas for social studies educators interested in fostering the development of cultural competence and encouraging service learning among their K-12 students. The website also includes the interactive Peace Corp Challenge (http://www.peacecorps.gov/kids/). This online game designed for upper elementary children fosters students' critical thinking skills about global health and social problems and encourages them to find solutions to specific issues faced by fictional African villagers.

- The professional book, *Diversity Programming for Digital Youth: Promoting Cultural Competence in the Children's Library* (Naidoo, 2014a), suggests how librarians can plan educational programs that promote cultural competency by way of culturally diverse books and digital media for children. Numerous multicultural digital apps are recommended, including ones with specific appeal for librarians working collaboratively with social studies teachers to explore social justice themes. For instance, the digital gaming app *Get Water!* by Decode Global is designed to help upper elementary children and tweens understand the scarcity of clean drinking water in countries around the world. The app can be used in conjunction with *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010) or *One Well: The Story of Water on Earth* (Strauss & Woods, 2007) in social studies lessons about basic human rights.

- Developed by Teaching Tolerance, Perspectives for a Diverse America (http://perspectives.tolerance.org/) is a literacy-based, social justice curriculum aligned to the U.S. Common Core State Standards and infused with an anti-bias education framework. This free curriculum is intended to teach students about diversity, build cultural competence, present social justice issues, and motivate students to action. Librarians and social studies teachers can work together to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of their local school population. The Teaching Tolerance website (http://www.tolerance.org/) also provides a rich resource of lesson plans, readings lists, think pieces, and anecdotal stories to encourage and inspire educators interested in social justice lessons.

- Approved in 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty describing the various social, cultural, political, and health rights of all children. The treaty provides a rich resource for social studies teachers and librarians to explore and foster engagement in social justice activities. Topics for exploration can include education rights, gender equality, health disparities, child trafficking, child soldiers, homelessness, etc. Fernekes and Baxter (2015) align some of these topics to various National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies and further emphasize the potential of the treaty for educating for social justice. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is available in child-friendly language (http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchilldfriendlylanguage.pdf) and is the subject of multiple children's books that could be used to introduce the treaty such as *This Child, Every Child: A Book About the World's Children* (Smith & Armstrong 2011) and *I Have the Right to Be a Child* (Serres, Fronty, & Mixter, 2012). Older students in high school can be introduced to the treaty after reading books such as McCormick's (2008) *Sold,* which describes child trafficking in India or Sullivan's (2013) *Gold Boy* which tackles albino harvesting in Africa. After students have read the books, explored the Convention, and discussed which rights are being violated (in the case of the novels for the high school students), they can then examine ways that they can make a difference and bring about change. Books such as *Pay It Forward Kids: Small Acts, Big Change* (Runstedler, 2013) provide prime examples of real children and teens engaged in social activism. They can be used by educators, to help students make the connection between what they have read and social engagement.

While not exhaustive in nature, these sources suggest materials and approaches for educating for social justice with a significant focus on traditional reading literacy. The subsequent section describes the potential for incorporating multiple literacies into the social studies curriculum to foster an even richer sense of social engagement.

Using Multiple Literacies to Educate for Social Justice

Librarians, particularly school media specialists, are trained to foster lifelong learning not only through traditional reading literacy but also through multiple literacies including information literacy, digital literacy, cultural literacy, visual literacy, and media literacy. The use of multiple literacies in a collaborative lesson or series of lessons with social studies teachers engages divergent learning styles of students and offers multiple opportunities for relevancy.

Information literacy as well as cultural and media literacy skills can be used to promote social justice and highlight propaganda or hate websites such as those created by white supremacists. Daniels' (2009) study of adolescents evaluating "cloaked websites" (websites that appear to be legitimate civil-rights sites but actually are fronts for white supremacist sites,) found that traditional approaches to media literacy (e.g. looking for bias in authorship, evaluating domain names) failed the students in being able to differentiate legitimate civil rights information from white supremacist rhetoric. She argues that critical understandings of race and racism are needed *in addition* to instrumental skills for evaluating online content as a way to appropriately contextualize and parse political content. Through a purposeful collaborative lesson created by the social studies teacher and librarian, high school students can explore these topics to learn not only how to evaluate the authenticity of information but to also explore embedded rhetoric.

To participate in a true multiple literacies lesson, students can also read children's books such as *My Parents Open Carry* (Jeffs, Nephew, & Bergman, 2014) or *God Made Dad and Mom* (Parker & Segura, 2013) and explore the various mediated social messages these books carry. Visual literacy can be employed as students analyze the visual cues and loaded symbols in the illustrations used in both books. As a call to action, students can strategize ways to help younger children identify propaganda in children's books and other media. They can also identify and share empowering, socially conscious children's books to foster cultural competence. Librarians and social studies educators can help students discuss the motives of the authors of books and websites, interrogating subjectivity and positionality alongside claims of "bias" and "impartiality."

An example of a lesson promoting social justice for upper elementary students can include discussion of the education rights of children. Swadener et al. (2013) examine how schools around the world address the educational rights of children and conclude that many countries have considerable work to do before all children equally receive these basic human rights. The topic of educational rights is one that can easily be taught to students using multiple literacies. See *Figure 1 (Appendix)* for an outline of suggested topics for collaborative lessons between a librarian and social studies teacher for students in grades 5-8. A variety of print and digital materials are suggested to meet the varying developmental and reading levels of students.

These lessons incorporate multimodal learning with culturally diverse children's literature to facilitate cultural competence while utilizing multiple literacies to educate for social justice. Students are engaged in visual, auditory, and hands-on activities and require competency in multiple literacies such as information, media, digital, visual, and cultural literacy. They are locating, evaluating, and synthesizing

information in order to communicate with peers and create new media. At the same time, these students are reaching beyond the scope of their cultural experiences to learn about current and historical events from the United States, Tanzania, and Pakistan. These books, along with digital media, provide a rich learning environment for examining the intersections of race, class, and culture in three diverse countries. The historical and current narratives provide a context for understanding the relevancy of education rights to contemporary students and augment experiences from their sociocultural worlds. Opportunities for social justice action and engagement are presented as well as modeled by students around the world. The interplay between the various print and digital media, as well multiple literacies, extends the lesson to attract students with multiple learning modalities.

Conclusion

The various strategies described in this article lay a foundation for justice work and empower social studies teachers, librarians, and students in the process. When social studies educators collaborate with librarians, there is a tremendous opportunity to develop enriching discussions, meaningful activities, and relevant projects that motivate students to action. Integrating critical technology perspectives along with culturally diverse print and digital resources creates opportunities in curricula to simultaneously build multiple literacies in service of social justice-oriented education. By working together to create learning opportunities that allow students to actively identify societal injustices resulting from racism, sexism, heterocentrism, ableism, classism, and so on, librarians and social studies teachers can set the foundation for active engagement in service learning projects or global activities, allowing students to "pay it forward." Properly structured lessons can scaffold learning about injustices experienced around the world and call children and teens to action.

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Appendix (*Figure 1: Social Justice Topics for Collaborative Lessons on the Education Rights of Children)*

 Education Rights of Children
Grades 5-8

Topic 1: Education Discrimination Based on Race: Have students read *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* (Tonatiuh, 2014) and listen to the clip of Sylvia Mendez and Sandra Mendez Duran on the StoryCorp website (http://storycorps.org/listen/sylvia-mendez-and-sandra-mendez-duran/). Encourage students to discuss how the education rights of Latino children were being ignored. Ask them to describe how they would feel if they were told they could not go to school with other children because they were presumed to be dirty and uneducated.

If social studies educators choose, they can focus on this topic for several class periods using the suggested lesson plans below. Some of these lessons will provide an opportunity to use the school library computers to examine online primary source materials related to the Mendez V. Westminster Case.

An in-depth lesson tying into Common Core Standards for English Language Arts in Grades 6-8 is available on the Vamos a leer: Teaching Latin America through Literacy Blog. (https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/cox-lesson-plan-unit-315.pdf).

To extend this lesson to a younger audience, social studies teachers and librarians can consult the lesson plan created by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) for grades 1-5. (http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/book-of-the-month-separate-is-never-equal.pdf).

Topic 2: Education Discrimination Based on Immigration Status: Have students listen to teenager Estafania's personal story related to the U.S. Dream Act on the community-supported, educational KQED Youth Radio (http://www.kqed.org/a/perspectives/R201011040735). Ask them to consider how her current story is similar and different from the historical story of Sylvia Mendez. Should Estafania and other students like her be denied the opportunity to attend college? Organize the class to participate in a debate about undocumented immigrants and education rights in the United States. Divide the class into two groups and let them use the school library computers and materials to research information about undocumented immigrants and education. Social studies teachers can work with school librarians to preselect websites as well as books and other materials that the students can use for research. One group will find information to support the argument that undocumented immigrants should have an opportunity to go to college and another group will find information to support the counter argument. Engage the students in the class debate.

Topic 3: Education Discrimination Based on Language Barriers: Have students watch *Present Tense* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5M_bPt85MNo), a short film created by three high school students in Zanzibar. The film describes how the English-only language policy in public

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schools, which was meant to equalize the education between government and private schools, creates access barriers to education and produces students who can speak little English and will mostly likely not graduate from high school. How is this type of education discrimination the same and different from the other types discussed? The film was created by high school students to call attention to a problem in their country. Have students identify a problem in their local community, state, or province and ask them to brainstorm a solution to the problem. Give students the opportunity to create a storyboard for their own digital story or digital movie that highlights the particular problem. Working with the school librarian, the social studies teacher will work with students to create their digital stories/movies. Students can work in small groups. Examples of other digital stories and points to consider when creating digital stories with students are available at EdTech Teacher's Digital Storytelling in the Classroom (http://edtechteacher.org/tools/multimedia/digital-storytelling/).

Topic 4: Education Discrimination Based on Gender: Have students watch one of the stories from the film *Girl Rising* (http://girlrising.com/) which profiles nine girls around the world and their struggle for an equal education. Using the *Girl Rising* curriculum (http://girlrising.com/curriculum/), social studies teacher and librarians can work together to scaffold learning about education discrimination of girls.

Have students choose one of the following short books to read about Malala Yousafzai: *Who Is Malala Yousafzai?*(Brown and Thomson, 2015), *Malala, a Brave Girl from Pakistan/Iqbal, a Brave Boy from Pakistan: Two Stories of Bravery* (Winter, 2014), or *Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words* (Abouraya & Wheatley, 2014). After reading the books to gain background information about Malala, have students listen to portions of one of her online speeches such as the Books not Bullets speech at education summit in Oslo, Norway (July 2015) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxOfTQYjy9o). Have students create a booktrailer for their book that captures Malala's passion and would get younger students interested in reading her story. Booktrailers will be shared in the school library with students in grades 2-3.

Educators could alternatively extend this lesson and have students read and discuss *I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World, Young Readers Edition* (Yousafzai & McCormick, 2014).

Using the Malala Fund website (http://www.malala.org/), encourage students to participate in the #BooksNotBullets campaign, posting photos of themselves with their favorite books.

Ask students to brainstorm how they can make a difference in the world to end education discrimination. They might raise money for the Because I am a Girl Fund (http://plan-international.org/girls/) to sponsor the education of a girl in another country; connect with students in other countries via Epals (www.epals.com) to brainstorm collaborative action with other students; participate in International Literacy Day activities organizing book drives or a Little Free Library; or connect with libraries around the world via theInternational Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)' Sister Libraries Program (https://sisterlibraries.wordpress.com/) to work with other children and teens to strategize ways to help children in the communities served by the libraries.

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Note from Editor: Although articles in this section of the journal are usually not double blind peer reviewed, in this instance (Naidoo & Sweeney, 2015) this was undertaken, in addition to a peer review from the section editor. We thank Naidoo & Sweeney for their perseverance with the onerous process.