A Qualitative Study into Teacher Instruction and Advocacy of Social Justice in International Kindergarten to Grade 2 Classrooms

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
Doctorate of Education Program

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A Qualitative Study into Teacher Instruction and Advocacy of Social Justice in International Kindergarten to Grade 2 Classrooms

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Transformational Leadership

Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
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Concordia University–Portland

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Abstract

This qualitative intrinsic case study examined how teachers instructed and advocated for social justice in the international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom. Social justice is an important topic for discussion and exploration for children of any age, yet the research revealed much of the focus on social justice in education was focused on older students, as some theorists felt younger children could not understand the complexities of the concept. Data were collected through focus groups, semistructured interviews, and the evaluation of values-based lesson plans. It was analyzed with the intent of gaining greater understanding of how teachers’ perspectives regarding social justice affected advocacy and instruction with their students. Through these methods, information was gathered then analyzed and interpreted using the framework method. The results of analysis showed that participants had an idea of what social justice was, and although not all specifically focused on social justice in their classroom, there were strategies and techniques used in their teaching style that contributed to the concepts of social justice such as equality, diversity, and acceptance. Teachers saw the value in the concepts of social justice and felt if approached from an appropriate age-level, their students would be instilled with these positive traits. Findings also implicated a need for schools to take an active responsibility in ensuring all staff and students understand social justice and what it means to themselves and those around them.

Keywords: social justice, instruction, advocate, teacher practice, lower primary, development
Dedication

I dedicate this study to those in the pursuit of justice and hope that they find opportunity to educate and support others in this endeavor. “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 New International Version).
Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge and thank God, for the strength and abilities He Has given me, as well as the passion for education and social justice. I could not have done it without Him. I would also like to thank my family for supporting me throughout all of this, especially my mom and dad, who know what it means to earn a doctorate degree. To my friends who have supported me by giving me space to work as well as spending time with me when I needed a break, I appreciate your friendship and support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social justice is an important topic for educators to be aware of; Bruce-Davis, Gilson, and Matthews (2017) noted one way to contemplate this topic is by focusing on social justice solutions that are reinforced by varied social groupings. Within the pursuit of social justice, it needs to be realized that children of all ages need to be introduced to what social justice is and how to advocate for it. Doucet and Adair (2013) advocated for teachers to begin conversations with students, stating that ignoring these topics will not prevent students from experiencing inequality or prejudice, but that the students would be unprepared to have an educated interaction to discuss these topics. It is in social justice that many values and perceptions are formed that create a pathway to a society that gravitates toward the accepting of diversity and naturally advocates for equality; as Ehrhardt-Madpathi, Pretsch, and Schmitt (2018) noted, “it is important to achieve classroom justice in primary schools to ensure good developmental conditions” (p. 338).

In the education system, a teacher can provide a consistent instruction and advocacy for social justice. The school administration can support a teacher in this endeavor by “[e]mpowering teachers [to] make good teaching choices by eliciting, motivating, engaging, supporting, and expanding the intellectual abilities of all students” (Hammond, 2015 as cited by Bassey, 2016, p. 36). With this empowerment, there are many social scenarios and situations that will allow a teacher to observe the students’ interactions and be able to have an understanding of how they communicate and connect with each other. By providing consistent instruction and observing students, a teacher can see areas of growth, and instruction can be targeted to promote the acceptance of others and the advocation of equality. This in turn can be relayed to the
administration as a means of feedback and basis for further growth in the area of social justice
advocation and instruction.

According to recent market research, in Eastern Asia as of August 2018, there were 1,458 international schools (Gaskell, 2018). An international school was defined as,

The school is in a country where English is one of the official languages and it delivers an English medium curriculum other than the country’s national curriculum and the school is international in its orientation OR The school delivers a curriculum to any combination of pre-school, primary or secondary students, wholly or partly in the English language outside an English-speaking country. (Gaskell, 2018, p. 5)

Within this region, China led with 851 international schools and 348,118 students enrolled (Gaskell, 2018). These students came from many different countries, and there were also local student who held international passports. These two factors of foreign students being educated with local students could create a challenge as each student tries to understand each other, foreign students are trying to learn about the culture in which they have arrived, as well as their own (Wa-Mbaleka & Ryszewski, 2012). The international school environment is a place where many cultures and perspectives come together.

This environment, coupled with the school’s curriculum and culture, can be a place for unity or division. Within this international school system in Eastern Asia, social justice is being addressed through ways such as project-based learning, curriculum development, community service opportunities, partnerships with other schools or charitable organizations (Szeto & Cheng, 2018). Many schools are prepared to inform and educate their students on social justice as well as provide opportunity to take what has been learned and connect with life applications.
As a teacher who has spent 14 years living abroad in Asia, it is clear to see that culture guides what children are taught morally and ethically, as well as how to approach certain situations from a social perspective. The beliefs of the family members as well as tradition provides children with their perspective from a young age (Allen & Kelly, 2015). It is when these perspectives collide with the rights of others to be accepted and considered as equals that social justice needs to be advocated for.

**Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Social Justice in education is not a new topic, and throughout research, students over the age of 10 years old are usually focused on, and there is not much data with younger students, those who are nine years old and younger (Henderson, 2009). This led the research in a unique direction, to utilize familiar theories in an unknown scenario. There were several theories utilized in this research, namely Critical Race Theory (Ortiz & Jani, 2010) as well as social justice theory (Ayala, Hage, & Lantz, 2011), transformative resistance theory (Henning, 2013), sociocultural theory (Cherry, 2018), and prototype theory (Mitchell, Goodyear, Both Gragg, Mirici, & Morgan, 2016).

Critical race theory focuses on allowing people of color the validation of their experiences but does not consider other marginalized minorities (Yosso, 2005). Social justice theory states that justice will allow for less physical and emotional suffering as well as a better relationship between members of the community (Ayala et al., 2011) and provides a context for meeting the needs of older children and adolescents. Both theories focus on social justice as an overarching goal, but neither focus specifically on the actions of young children.

Transformative resistance theory states any resistance utilized will be of benefit if the resistance is against skewed perspectives or flawed beliefs (Henning, 2013) while sociocultural
theory relies on development being created by cultural and societal connections (Cherry, 2018), and prototype theory leans “on the assumption that most concepts have certain recognizable, characteristic features even when formal definitions are difficult to develop” (Mitchell et al., 2016, p. 3). These theories lent structure to the research and provided a foundational plane which allowed for a greater understanding of how the research was to be interpreted.

Realizing there was a need for a focus on younger students, the researcher focused the conceptual framework on the instruction and advocacy of teachers in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom. Each aspect of the framework was to connect the theories and thinking toward the common goal of investigating how social justice could be advocated for in a lower primary classroom. Within this framework, it was evident why social justice in lower primary is important, and how the teacher’s instruction and advocacy of it impacted student perspectives and outcomes.

**Statement of the Problem**

Social Justice is often seen as an issue for older students, or even considered an important aspect of being an adult (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). Henderson (2009) also noted the same concern of younger students not being included in social justice instruction, realizing there was much more emphasis needed to be utilized in growing the understanding of social justice at the primary school level. In seeking further clarity, Conte, Grazzani, and Pepe (2018) found that children as young as two and three years of age showed an ability to use prosocial skills in peer interactions, thereby leading to the recommendation that young children should also be introduced to and instructed in social justice.

While there has been a surge of interest in social justice in early years and primary classrooms, much of the previous research focuses on older students, thus limiting the
expectations of younger children by not including the importance of teaching social justice as a part of character development or as a societal expectation (Cefai et al., 2015; Conte et al., 2018; Henderson, 2009). Allowing children to form biased and unjust perspectives without correction will create a fixed mindset that will be difficult to change (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Instruction and advoication of social justice in education is beneficial for students, teachers, and society (Conte et al., 2018).

Within an international school setting, the topic of social justice is in a wide context of multiple cultures. Monocultural schools within a home country do not face the same level of issues due to the amount of similarities, although they are not without their issues (Mistry & Sood, 2015). An international, multicultural school setting places students and teachers out of what they know to be familiar and into an environment that needs to be navigated for understanding and clarity. It is in this state that social justice becomes important; while beginning to understand multiple cultures and how each person fits into the environment, perceptions and systems are formed (Ibrahim, 2010; Mistry & Sood, 2015).

While not all schools address social justice directly, or use the term, there are values and character traits that are a part of the school culture. These types of traits or values may include compassion, confidence, empathy, diversity, equality, or justice. Hawkins (2013) noted that research in the 21st century points to young children being capable of understanding and that they need to be active participants in the social construction of the world around them. By inclusion of social justice traits and values, students would receive further opportunity to create “an empowering environment . . . to confront their own socialization, cultural identity, and values . . . to focus on acculturation, privilege, and oppressions so students may better understand
themselves and help each other grow as culturally responsive and socially just” individuals (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 278).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how social justice is treated in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 multicultural, international school classroom. As there is not much research on social justice being taught to lower primary students, this is an area of study that is in deficit (Henning, 2009). By initiating a study that not only focuses on lower primary students, but also students in the multicultural, international school environment, it provided a unique examination of how teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in their classrooms.

This was an initial examination to see what could be added or changed to current practices to ensure social justice is instructed and advocated for in an age appropriate manner and monitored for understanding and ability in a lower primary classroom. When students are met at a developmentally appropriate level, given the instruction and tools to be successful in maintaining a socially just classroom, it will benefit their learning (Ehrhardt-Madpathi, Pretsch, & Schmitt, 2018). This study showed strengths and areas of growth in classroom practices and could lead to a professional development strategy plan to be implemented in classrooms by teachers.

**Research Question**

For this study, the research question was,

- How do Kindergarten to Grade 2 teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in a lower primary setting within a multicultural, international school?
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The rationale was to observe and understand how social justice is treated in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom within a multicultural, international school. Looking at whether teachers noticed social issues and addressed them proactively, reactively, or not at all. Social issues in this context could be based on race, ethnocentrism, gender identity, differences in need or ability, or differences in socioeconomic status.

The results of this study could be applied in future practice regarding social justice in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom. Social justice continues to be a topic in education, and there is less focus on young students (Henderson, 2009). Further research will allow for greater insight and preparedness in instructing and advocating for social justice.

The significance of this study remains in the emphasis on social justice awareness and how teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in a multicultural, international school setting. Very few studies have focused on lower primary students in their pursuit for evaluating how to advocate for social justice in education. This study was able to provide greater insight on how teachers could be successful with instruction and advocacy of social justice within the classroom and be able to focus on commonalities for change.

Within the study, the emphasis on Kindergarten to Grade 2 allowed for a narrow scope and a clear ability to focus of a specific age level of student. This emphasis allowed for greater definition of results to be utilized with a wider range of teacher and students within the same grade level and beyond. A narrow scope, of focusing on lower primary students, provided more focused data to be used when evaluating the understanding and ability of young children regarding social justice.
Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions what were used throughout the study and pertained to the research question.

**Advocate:** This term is described as “one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group” (Advocate, 2019).

**Culture:** This term is described as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (Culture, 2019).

**Diversity:** This term is described as “the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization” (Diversity, 2019).

**Ethnocentric:** This term is described as “characterized by or based on the attitude that one’s own group is superior” (Ethnocentric, 2019).

**Equality:** This term is described as “the quality or state of being equal” (Equality, 2019).

**Instruct:** This term is described as “to give knowledge to” (Instruct, 2019).

**Moral character:** This term is described as “an individual’s disposition to think, feel, and behave in an ethical versus unethical manner, or as the subset of individual differences relevant to morality” (Cohen & Morse, 2014, p. 8).

**Social Justice in Education:** This term is described as “guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (Cochran-Smith 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 8). It could also mean “educating students in a fair and just manner and also preparing them to become **change agents**, or people equipped to fight for what they believe is right once they enter the world” (Stearns, 2019, What is Social Justice section, para. 2).
Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

In research, assumptions are “issues, ideas, or positions found anywhere from the beginning of the study design to the final report, that are taken for granted and viewed as reasonable and widely accepted” (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019, p. 160). In this study, it was assumed that all teachers were employed under contract by the international school, versus being student teachers or adult volunteers. It was also assumed that the teachers had set lesson plans and classroom management strategies in place to provide a supportive environment for students to be successful. A third assumption was that participants would be truthful and honest when participating in the focus group and interview portions of the study, and that they would not coach their students to act a certain way when the teacher is under observation.

A delimitation is a boundary or constraints set by the researcher to ensure the objective can be reached (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). In this study, I sought to understand how social justice advocation and instruction by the teacher impacted the students in the lower primary years. The focus was on homeroom instruction time and did not include other classes such as English Language Development, foreign language, or specials classes (art, computers, music, PE, and dance).

The choice to focus on homeroom teachers was based on the time spent with students as well as content. English Language Development teachers spend two hours and 15 minutes each day with their students, specials teachers spend 45 minutes each day, and foreign language teachers spend 40 minutes each day whereas homeroom teachers spend up to five hours a day with their students. Also, the English Language Development, specials, and foreign language teachers focus on one subject in their classes, while homeroom teachers instruct across four subjects.
Limitations of a study outline possible areas of weakness that cannot be controlled by the researcher and are related other factors connected to the study, such as the research design (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Within the parameters of this study, a few limitations were noted: time constraints, participation from teachers, and social justice awareness. Time could have hindered or restricted the researcher’s contact with participants due to job requirements, meetings, school-wide events, or holidays that may have interfered with meetings or observations. As this study was drawing from one international school, participation, or lack of, would have affected the study if few teachers chose to participate. As the research design had a small sample size, not having full participation would have been unfavorable and greatly limiting to the data. Finally, if the topic of social justice was not familiar to the teachers, and they did not understand how to advocate or instruct for social justice in their classroom, then their lack of awareness would have been a limitation.

Summary

In Chapter 1, an outline was laid out regarding how the research study came to be as well as how it was implemented. The research question, “How do Kindergarten to Grade 2 teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in a lower primary setting within a multicultural, international school?” was stated as well as the initial interest and need for a focus on social justice in the classroom. In reality, less emphasis on discussing social justice with younger children could impact young children being held accountable for their actions (Park, 2011; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004) and is not allowing them to have the tools they need to form a solid foundation that supports and advocates for social justice in their school, community, and across the globe (Bruce-Davis, Gilson, & Matthews, 2017). This is an issue that needs to be addressed.
This chapter introduced the various aspects of the research study, including the conceptual framework, which gave reasons to why the topic is important, and provided an understanding of what this researcher will focus on within the study. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were provided to give understanding of the study parameters and areas where changes beyond the researcher’s control may occur once the study begins. By providing clear definitions, the significance was conveyed and understanding of meanings throughout the text will be apparent. Moving forward, each following chapter provides specific information on this research study.

In Chapter 2, a literature review on social justice in education will provide a focused basis of scholarly materials to build upon and identify key concepts and focus points. Chapter 3 will provide clear information on the methodology of the study, giving detail to how each part of the research study was completed. It also accounted for the study design, limitations, data collection and analysis, validity, expected findings, and ethical issues within the study. Chapter 4 reveals where the findings were analyzed, and Chapter 5 has the conclusions as well as recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

To consider how to best understand and analyze the literature involving the role and teaching of core values and social justice in the context of culture and societal norms in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom, this researcher utilized the critical thinker’s mindset developed by Machi and McEvoy’s (2016) to examine peer reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, and other educational documents to provide an informed foundation for the study. Articles and books were found and compiled using a search process of several key word searches such as social justice, primary students, elementary, and students. The main databases and websites accessed to search for the literature included Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO), ProQuest, and Science Direct through online searches using Google, Concordia University’s online library, and Trinity Western University’s online library. Through the reading and analysis of found articles, further articles were gleaned by viewing the references within the article.

To begin the literature review, the conceptual framework was conducted to first introduce the topic and explain the importance of social justice within the classroom. The researcher discussed age (Park, 2011; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004), family and cultural influences (Allen & Kelly, 2015) and peer relationships (Bornstein, 2012), all of which affect children’s understanding and ability to apply social justice within their own lives. The conceptual framework included how student learning benefits not only the child, but society as a whole, as well as current misconceptions and historical references of where social justice has failed. Next, the major and/or common theories found within the literature were discussed, with critical race theory being at the forefront then social justice theory and sociocultural theory working as secondary and tertiary theories, respectively.
This examination of the literature took a focused review on the field of social justice and young children and how each theory lent credibility as well as validity to the topic. The information within the literature review was comprised of current social justice practices, different methods to teach social justice, diversity, and multicultural competency, as well as the lack of resources for children to use and uninformed educators. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion on how each theory impacts the research and outlines how children can utilize the rewards and benefits of a social justice mindset in an educational and diverse setting. It is up to the educator to understand and facilitate opportunities in a safe, informed environment (Ibrahim, 2010).

**Conceptual Framework**

Social justice in education “means guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (Cochran-Smith, 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 8). Moral character can be considered “as an individual’s disposition to think, feel, and behave in an ethical versus unethical manner, or as the subset of individual differences relevant to morality” (Cohen & Morse, 2014, p. 8). The foundation for social justice and moral character begins in children as young as three years old, yet many school programs have not held students accountable regarding their ability to understand social justice until a later age, such as students of age 11 or 12 (Park, 2011; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004), due to a belief that young students cannot understand the implications of racism, diversity, or cultural insensitivity. It is this omission of accountability within early childhood and lower primary aged students that can allow mindsets of prejudice, nationalism, or superiority to become a part of the student’s way of thinking (Araujo & Strasser, 2003).
negative or biased mindset, coupled with cultural and family influences, can greatly effect students understanding of their role in social justice within the classroom, which includes “empathy for others, understanding of themselves, and the ability to connect to others in local and global society, will help students to recognize and seek out authentic problems” (Bruce-Davis et al., 2017, p. 250).

International schools bring many cultures together under one roof. Working in an international school for six years has provided this researcher many opportunities to see how different perspectives can be between culture, as well as within a single culture. From young to old, students identify each other based on look and language, placing value based on these identifying markers (Doucet & Adair, 2013). For example, while interacting with a pre-kindergarten class of students four to five years old, a group of students from one country were shunning a student from their same country because she had played with classmates who were not from the same country. The first group felt the student was betraying their country by not playing with them exclusively. The student had a well-rounded view on her peers, that a friend is a friend, yet her country mates refused to play with her.

This example shows how easy it is for diversity and impartiality to be punished, which can be devastating for young children, as it can also impact their social emotional learning (Allen & Kelly, 2015). Within the education system, social justice needs to not only be a catch phrase, but a standard of practice for teachers to instruct and advocate for. While multiple cultures may create a challenge, there needs to be an expectation of acceptance, a celebration of diversity, and a promotion of equality.

Families and culture play a large role in child development as it is the foundation of what they know and understand (Allen & Kelly, 2015). As such, actions or words spoken from family
members or those within the same culture, hold a greater weight than that from sources and peers outside the family, and impact a child’s understanding of the world (Allen & Kelly, 2015). An ethnocentric mindset, which is “characterized by or based on the attitude that one’s own group is superior” (Ethnocentric, 2019), can have detrimental effects on a child as it does not allow them to see other cultures as equal, therefore making others less important and themselves superior (Bornstein, 2012).

Piaget’s model of cognitive development stated if a student is not old enough to read or write, they cannot understand the complexities of equality, justice, diversity, or inclusion (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). This belief undermined the social interactions and observations students of a young age make, no matter where they are. These would include interactions and observations stem from family values, cultural norms, and experiences the students have had on both an interaction and observational level (Bruce-Davis et al., 2017). It is these early observations and interactions that form a foundation for the child to begin to understand and interpret the world around them.

Based on the previously mentioned definition of social justice (Cochran-Smith 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009), it is essentially the teacher’s role to facilitate student understanding of what social justice is as well as the students’ role in it. Also, how the student can be an advocate for social justice and an ally to those who may be oppressed by the current societal conventions and beliefs. Within a multicultural classroom, there are many beliefs stemming from family and culture, as well as the observed culture of the country in which they live.

Hawkins (2014) drew on a need to develop awareness in both preschoolers and early years educators “to respect and value Difference, Diversity, and Human Dignity (the Three Ds)”
He saw this as a need to adjust or reshape prior thinking from theorists such as Piaget, who believed social reasoning began in the early teen years (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). Kohlberg also believed children began to understand and follow moral actions most commonly by the age of 12 (McLeod, 2013).

Figure 1. Theories utilized in the social justice education literature.

There was much research in the field of social justice and young children, as Figure 1 demonstrates, many theories are utilized in these studies. Some of the theories used in the research are social justice theory (Dover, 2010; Ehrhardt-Madpathi et al., 2018; Rodriguez, Chambers, Gonzalez, & Scheurich, 2010; Snyder, Peeler, & May, 2008; Winterbottom, C. & Winterbottom, S. S., 2017), transformative resistance theory (Henning, 2013), sociocultural theory (Lee, 2011; McDonald, 2007; Park, 2011) and prototype theory (Mitchell et al., 2016); however, a theory focused on by many researchers is critical race theory (Canlas, Argenal, & Bajaj, 2015; Jayavant, 2016; Kaur, 2012; Lageson, 2017; Marbely, Rouson, Burley, Ross, Bonner II, Lértora, & Huang, 2017; Navarro, 2018; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2018).
Each theory lent credence to the research and outlined how children, young and old, reaped the rewards and benefits of a social justice mindset in an educational setting.

Social justice theory stands on the belief that the lack of justice increases both emotional and physical suffering and creates a higher chance to be susceptible to illness as well as affect the wellbeing of families, the community, and societal relationships (Ayala et al., 2011). It found its roots in a just and unbiased dispersal of power to all regardless of age, race, or status (van den Bos, 2003), whereas sociocultural theory stemmed from the belief an individual’s development is chiefly influenced by their culture and social interactions (Cherry, 2018). Sociocultural theory traditionally focused on the micro-level interactions between people, and not on the “systems of meaning and power that people build, reproduce, and contest in and through their interactions with one another” (Lewis & Moje, 2003 as cited by Park, 2011, p. 396). While these two theories focused on social interaction, critical race theory extended this notion into how these social interactions are affected by race and power (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004).

Critical race theory in education pushed against the mainstream ideals and the White dominated societal norms of Whites having privilege and access to better resources while People of Color stagnated in deficiency and were rife with disadvantage, to validating and focusing on People of Color and their experiences (Yosso, 2005). While racism was not the only issue within the social justice context, it was one of the most prevalent; if a student of color does not feel they were equal with their White peers and did not see anyone advocating for them, they did not feel that this equality was unattainable (Yosso, 2005). The difficulty with the focus on the race as the social justice issue was that it undermined others who were also struggling (Yosso, 2005), such as students from low income families, sexual minorities, medically compromised students or
those who are bullied for other reasons (Mulé, Lippus, Santora, Cicala, Smith, Cataldo, & Li, 2009). “When students in a school feel accepted, they will be comfortable accessing school services when faced with social justice concerns” (Mulé et al., 2009, p. 7). With opportunity and exposure at the forefront (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004), it is up to the educator to understand and facilitate opportunities for students to understand, navigate, and experiment with the actions and ideals of social justice in a safe, informed environment.

According to Park (2011), the difficulty lived in the belief that children were not able to use the appropriate social tools such as language, physical items, symbols, sociocultural meaning, and racial or ethnic classification systems, often kept for adults. With this idea that children could not use the same social tools as adults, their opportunity and involvement in social justice within the classroom, and in the world around them, might have been stunted or underdeveloped. Park (2011) also noted that children as young as three years old could and were willing to begin a dialogue on diversity, equality, and social justice.

Hawkins (2014) continued to focus on early childhood students and their abilities to make decisions based on morals, opinion, empathy, and compassion. Aligned with other 21st century research, the data, collected via individual interviews, set curriculum, observations, and videotaped sessions, showed a contradiction and re-development of prior theorists, such as Piaget or Kohlberg, as it displayed a notable lack of strategies to teach for social justice (Hawkins, 2014). If it was to be believed that children can be a part of the social justice conversation, an overhaul of previous theories was required.

When educators move out of the known into the unknown, progress and acceptance could be reached. As Mitchell, Goodyear, Both Gragg, Miri, and Morgan (2016) noted with Prototype theory, the concept of introducing younger children to the intricacies of diversity, equality, and
social justice might seem difficult to develop and ascertain the best practices for teaching. However, it was the inevitability of exposure that would spur educators to desire an understanding and focus to approach this topic with young children. The research completed by Mitchell et al. (2016) also highlighted a significant flaw in the educator’s approach to social justice; there were more reactive than proactive actions. When educators were reactive, they missed the opportunities to provide beneficial, useful guidelines for students to glean from when confronted with socially unjust situations.

Transformative resistance theory (TRT) contended that “people utilize different forms of resistance, ranging from less productive to more productive” (Henning, 2013, p. 124). In this manner, the resistance represented the need for educators to push against their own personal beliefs and biases to incorporate social justice education into the classroom. This must be an active decision that is consistent and becomes an organic part of an educator’s pedagogy. For this study, the notion of transformational resistance was essential in the way it addressed the issues that many new social justice educators raise in their own individual and collective struggles, and then choose to act upon.

While Kayama, Haight, Ku, Cho, and Lee (2016) used socialization theory specifically regarding students with disabilities, the findings were relatable to typically developing children as well. These socialization practices were necessary to lessen the effect of a child’s “individual and socially-embedded selves; specifically, their own desires and interests (individual-self) and development of culturally valued attitudes and behavior (socially-embedded self)” (p. 414). The concept of “intentional and unintentional” (p. 416) socialization realized that unspoken communication also had an impact on student understanding; an educator’s response to a student or incident of social justice can have great impact on the observer.
This concept of personal and group desires and motives was further expounded upon by Farnsworth’s (2010) usage of Bakhtin’s notions of dialogue in community-based learning (CBL), which were that,

every level of expression from live conversational dialog to complex cultural expression in other genres and art works is an ongoing chain or network of statements and responses, repetitions, and quotations, in which new statements presuppose earlier statements and anticipate future responses. (Irvine, 2012, Dialogue/Dialogic/Dialogism section, para. 1)

This concept of community-based learning (CBL) relied on utilizing two perspectives of Bakhtin’s theory; first, in hearing the perspectives from the individual as part of their identity, and second, as an interpretation of how these perspectives influence the group (Farnsworth, 2010). The ability to understand and interpret other’s perspectives would allow educators to be prepared to facilitate meaningful discussions and bridge activities within the classroom.

To consider the multicultural aspects of the classroom, critical race theory addressed the nuances of young children approaching each other from a cross-cultural perspective. Many researchers see teachers at the basis of this theory (Marbley et al., 2017; Navarro, 2018; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Santamaría, 2014). The teacher interactions and acceptance, spoken and unspoken, as well as teaching strategies form a future foundation for thinking and learning of social justice. It is in this teacher-student relationship that teachers can begin to address social justice from a relational perspective, by teaching with social justice (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004). As students see the teacher instructing and advocating for social justice in the classroom, they are more receptive to the value of being aware of the diversity, ethnicity, and cultural differences that does not need to separate students but bring them to a place of celebration and inclusion.
Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

Within the literature in the field of social justice in education, there were commonalities that connected research as well as the methods that created a solid foundation for current understanding and future research focus. While there were variables within each researcher’s study, there was a shared need to recognize how young children understand and interpret social relationships, interactions, and make connections to culture, diversity, and equality. In the research literature, it was noted that a large majority of studies (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010; Canlas et al., 2015; Cefai et al., 2015; Cho & Choi, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Dover, 2015; Hagerman & Porath, 2018; Hawkins, 2014; Henning, 2013; Jayavant, 2016; Kayama et al., 2016; Lageson, 2017; Lee, 2011, 2014; Lichty & Palamaro-Munsell, 2017; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Navarro, 2018; Park, 2011; Winterbottom, C., & Winterbottom, S.S., 2017) used qualitative methods to collect, assess, and analyze data.

The use of qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to observe and record the participants’ personal experiences and perspectives while allowing these data to be connected to the research. The four most common research methods were interviews, artifact collection, and observations and/or field notes, as this researcher noted when reviewing the literature. Baxter and Jack (2010) noted, “Each data source is one piece of the ‘puzzle,’ with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon” (p. 554). A great deal of emphasis was put on using multiple methods as many studies used three or four data collection methods. The results of these multiple method studies provided a greater foundation that was useful in understanding how to make more suitable and effectual connections to social justice in education.
Qualitative and mixed method data collection supported the research questions that were backed by various theories. While Suri (2011) noted, “With the growth of research activity in recent years, each topic tends to be examined by different researchers in diverse contexts, employing a wide range of methods, invariably resulting in disparate findings on the same topic” (p. 63), many authors of these studies found roots in a theory that was a basis for their research. This allowed them to utilize appropriate collection methods while laying a foundation of understanding how a theory could support the research question(s). These theories were applied across many subjects and themes and were analyzed with the study findings.

Tierney (1993) stated that Critical Race Theory “attempt[s] to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (as cited by Ortiz & Jani, 2010, p. 176). This was a major theory noted when researching social justice in education and has implications for deeper study (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). The focus on critical race theory by many researchers (Canlas et al., 2015; Jayavant, 2016; Kaur, 2012; Lageson, 2017; Marbley et al., 2017; Navarro, 2018; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Ryan, & Grieshaber, 2004; Santamaría, 2014) allowed for a wider range of data to be collected.

In a study focused on leadership, Jayavant (2016) discovered the use of critical race theory to assess school principals’ ability to utilize applied critical leadership while Santamaría (2014), who also focused on leadership, found “the need for alternative models of leadership as a response to diversity in schools and universities, and value in exploring connections between multicultural education and educational leadership” (p. 347). While both focused on critical race theory, they came to different conclusions; Santamaría (2014) found there was a need for other leadership models based on the diversity in education as well as a need to investigate correlations between diversity and leadership in education, while Jayavant (2016) concluded this theory in
The context of educational leadership was still largely unexplored. Critical race theory impacted both studies by allowing the researchers to make concrete conclusions regarding social justice from a leadership perspective.

The focus by other researchers was set to explore critical race theory through curriculum and teaching strategies (Canlas et al., 2015; Lageson, 2017; Marbey et al., 2017; Navarro, 2018; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Ryan, & Grieshaber, 2004; Santamaría, 2014). Ryan and Grieshaber (2004) found teachers needed to alter their preconceived notions of social justice and accept new practices for diversity and inclusion by not relying on current practices but ensuring they are educating students in a manner that reflects their ability to succeed in a global society. Navarro (2018) found teachers were already willing to dissect their methods and pedagogy to ensure that their practices promoted social justice and inclusion of People of Color as well as other marginalized people groups. The use of the critical race theory within the research allowed for reflective inquiry to take place.

Mulé et al. (2009) argued that while People of Color had a right to equality, there were also other marginalized groups such as social economic status, sexual identification, cyberbullying, or health-based needs who needed advocacy for social justice issues. Within an educational setting there were visible and invisible issues that affected how adults and peers treated these marginalized students. Mulé et al. (2009) noted that while, “social justice is a term that is not easily defined, professionals in school psychology have characterized it as the idea that all students are entitled to be treated with fairness and respect” (North, 2006; Shriberg et al., 2008, as cited on p. 6). Fairness and respect are two qualities that should be achieved by all, and in this context, Mulé et al. (2009) posited school administrators needed to be pushing for
reformation of school policy to include social justice awareness and preventions to support all students.

Kaur (2012) focused on teacher preparation findings gleaned from previous research conducted by others in the field. It was felt the reflection on previous research allowed for a clearer understanding of what has been learned from the past and how it can inform future studies (Kaur, 2012). Kaur’s (2012) assessment solidified the view that further study and research by noting areas of strength in prior research as well as areas still needing focus and further study; she also noted teaching strategies and greater awareness were needed to improve social justice practices in education.

Conte et al. (2018) focused their research on very young children, of ages two and three years old and their emotion, intellect, and language ability and awareness. In this study, theory of mind was used, which stated “development suggests that true comprehension of others’ internal states is attained at around 4 years, given that most children systematically fail false-belief tasks before this age” (Wellman & Liu, 2004 as cited by Conte et al., 2018, p. 815). It was found that these young children were able to make connections between helping another child and understand it was making them happy (Conte et al., 2018). This awareness at a young age gave credibility to the idea that children understand and seek to use prosocial skills with others. Within the parameters of studying young children, this study provided credibility to similar studies in its results, thereby creating stronger links that young children are capable of true comprehension prior to the age of 4 (Conte et al., 2018).

Continued focus within the parameters of young children, Henderson (2009) posited that a lack of focus on social justice education deprived young students the “opportunity to develop skills such as empathy, cooperation, critical thinking, problem-solving and democratic
participation” (p. 5). The inability to see young children as being able to learn these important skills was a short-sided view on the part of the educator. Building value and character traits into learning was important from the day a student engaged in an educational setting. This supported the need to counteract deficit within the primary grades’ classroom (Henderson, 2009).

While this study focused on social justice in the lower primary classroom, it was valuable to assess and analyze literature within varying levels of education to gain clearer understanding of social justice research within education. Within the parameters of using the social justice theory in education, both student and teacher education were at the forefront. Rodriguez et al. (2010) focused on social justice-oriented education programs to encourage administration preparation programs to place heavy emphasis on social justice at root of student recruitment and admittance to ensure a diverse study body, program development, and program delivery while C. Winterbottom and S. S. Winterbottom (2017) considered the influence of head teachers/leadership, which was found to be successful and it was noted both home and school were influencers. Dover (2010) found secondary English teachers defined teaching for social justice using three components—curriculum, pedagogy, and social action. Snyder, Peeler, and May (2008) reviewed culturally relevant practices to teach students how to work for social justice goals through phased actions. Finally, Ehrhardt-Madpathi et al. (2018) noted a bidirectional link between classroom justice and behavior problems, as in there was a connection between the two; as classroom justice increased, behavior problems decreased, and vice versa.

Of the sociocultural theory-based studies, two focused on teachers (Lee, 2011; McDonald, 2007) and the other focused on young children, aged 5 to 8 (Park, 2011). While focused on teacher education, both Lee (2011) and McDonald (2007) noted a disconnect from the participants regarding social justice and teaching practices, based on the lack of support from
context within both theory and practice to connect the two areas. Park (2011) found that young children were able to be successful when facing social justice scenarios and did not struggle to connect the value of social justice with their social choices. These studies lent credence to the sociocultural theory as young children, from a time perspective, have fewer social interactions than adults and could be challenged and could implement changes (Lee, 2011; McDonald, 2007; Park, 2011).

**Review of Methodological Issues**

Many aspects of studied materials needed to be considered as research was completed; especially the methods used in relevant studies and the resulting data. By reviewing prior methods and data analysis, current and future methods could be honed and shaped to fit the parameters of the research question more correctly (Creswell, 2013). The ability to learn from, critique, and modify past research prepared the researcher for greater success in choosing the best method and format for research. In researching the topic of social justice in the classroom, all three research methods were utilized, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method, with qualitative methods being the most common type of research. Each method used was analyzed and critiqued to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the research to provide a foundation for preparing the appropriate research method on the topic of social justice in the classroom.

**Qualitative research.** The research found on social justice in the classroom were mainly qualitative in nature and consist of research methods including interviews, field notes/observations, artifact collection, and focus group data (Canlas et al., 2015; Hagerman & Porath, 2018; Henning, 2013). Interviews were the most common research method utilized (Agarwal et al., 2010; Canlas et al., 2015; Cho & Choi, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009;
Gorski, 2009; Hagerman & Porath, 2018; Hawkins, 2014; Henning, 2013; Ibrahim, 2010; Jayavant, 2016; Kayama et al., 2016; Lageson, 2017; Lee, 2011; Lee, 2014; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Navarro, 2018; Park, 2011; Santamaría, 2014; Winterbottom, C. & Winterbottom, S. S., 2017). As noted by Creswell (2013), there were similar characteristics in all types of qualitative research and the differing aspects provided an emphasis on different characteristics, depending on the project. In looking at the methods used, most studies completing interviews paired this method with other qualitative methods, few used interviews as the sole method. After reviewing those who did only use interviews, it was found the research did reach conclusions, although there were implications for further study if more concrete conclusions were to be found (Cho & Choi, 2016; Jayavant, 2015; Kayama et al., 2016; Lichty & Palamaro-Munsell, 2017).

The use of multiple qualitative methods was found to be more useful in acquiring results with a conclusive result. For those who used four methods of a varied style of research, there was greater understanding of the research question, assessment, and conclusion, as discovered by the researching team (Agarwal et al., 2010; Canlas et al., 2015; Hagerman & Porath, 2018). While some gained new concerns and issues that stemmed from evaluating the research not previously considered such as sustaining teacher morale and motivation (Henning, 2013), it showed that the use of four methods grounded the study in a wider data access pool for research. It is important to consider the trustworthiness of these studies. Efron (2013) stated, “The most common methods to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative action research studies are triangulation, disciplined subjectivity, thick description, member checking, peer review, and data audit” (p. 70). Within these qualitative studies, triangulation was evident in the number of data collections used.
Regarding the weaknesses that may have stemmed from using a qualitative method, Hammarberg, Kirkman, and de Lacey (2016) posited qualitative methods could be considered mistrustful and not data-driven enough as the data are often representative of a small population and based on perspective rather than an objective manner. Further, results could have been unreliable due to researcher bias or experiences. However, as researchers continued to collect and analyze data, using methods of trustworthiness (Efron, 2013) would ensure impartial results. With this in mind, there was a need for careful assessment and rigor in evaluating qualitative research results through peer review and managing of personal bias.

**Quantitative research.** Few quantitative research methods were used in the research found on the topic of social justice in the classroom. Of the articles reviewed (Cochran & Weaver, 2017; Ibrahim, 2010; Santamaría, 2014), surveys were the sole basis of quantitative study; however, they also appeared as a part of mixed method study along with other data collection methods. Hammarberg et al. (2016) noted quantitative research has the capacity to be rejected by researchers who feel it does not completely grasp the complexity of a person’s experience, guides expectation in study design, and does not provide concrete conclusions as conjecture is needed to understand how people interpret the data. As such, there was more to be gleaned from qualitative or mixed method research in the topic of social justice.

**Mixed methods research.** The mixed method research approach of combining qualitative and quantitative research was common when focused on the study of social justice (Dover, 2015; Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Ibrahim, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2016; Santamaría, 2014; Tanko, 2013). The use of multiple methods from both qualitative and quantitative methods provided a dual approach to the research. Conclusions were made showing a strong need for social justice and not just political activism and new questions such as how to work within a
system that maintained unjust social standings, were raised. It was found, in some cases, that the research answered questions that had not been previously considered, namely the ineffectiveness of the system and its “unjust educational landscape” (Dover, 2015, p. 370).

The strengths of a mixed method approach lent to not having a one-sided approach to research. Creswell (2013) stated that mixed method was “one that bridges qualitative and quantitative research” (p. 5). The idea of a bridge gives a visual representation of connection and working toward the same goal. “By being willing to accept alternative methodologies, we can expand the range of problems we can address because we have more ways of doing so” (Harling, 2012, p. 6). Utilization of the best strategies for the research benefited the researcher and allowed the question or problem to be addressed in a focused, thorough manner.

In garnering a larger method pool beyond a school or district, the characteristics of a method could provide evidence to support other data collected (Creswell, 2013). This could also be considered a weakness as it might provide an overload of data for the researcher(s) to analyze. It was imperative the researcher to use a critical eye when determining the parameters of the study.

**Conclusion.** As with all research, methods and procedures must be carefully considered to ensure best methodology for the questions being asked. While interviews were the most common method of data collection (Agarwal et al., 2010; Canlas et al., 2015; Cho & Choi, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Gorski, 2009; Hagerman & Porath, 2018; Hawkins, 2014; Henning, 2013; Ibrahim, 2010; Jayavant, 2016; Kayama et al., 2016; Lageson, 2017; Lee, 2011; Lee, 2014; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Navarro, 2018; Park, 2011; Santamaría, 2014; Winterbottom, C. & Winterbottom, S. S., 2017), the researcher still needed to ensure it was the appropriate method for this study and not just use it based on popularity. For the topic of social justice, and the
questions being answered, qualitative methods stood out as having more detailed results which had a greater ability to be assessed and analyzed. Having considered the types of qualitative methodologies, utilizing more than one style provided a broader basis for understanding the participants’ opinions and experiences and allowed a deeper understanding of their grasp of the topic (Agarwal et al., 2010; Canlas et al., 2015; Hagerman & Porath, 2018). When analyzing multiple strategies, further study may be required as other issues or questions may come from the research. This will allow the researcher to continue to hone and provide a more specific, clear method and make a conclusion.

**Synthesis of Research Findings**

Social justice in education is a term meaning to guide “students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (Cochran-Smith 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 8). It can also be defined as, “educating students in a fair and just manner and also preparing them to become change agents, or people equipped to fight for what they believe is right once they enter the world” (Stearns, 2019, What is Social Justice section, para. 2). Within the scope of education there are many theories proposed to challenge the method by which the foundations of social justice should be taught, the most frequent is that of critical race theory. While critical race theory is a common framework for research for social justice in education, researchers within the various theories have focused on different topic areas. These areas include leadership roles, curriculum or pedagogy, teaching strategies, teacher education programs, and student-based experiences.

Such theories are tested and trialed under several research methods, most commonly through qualitative methods that rely on the participants’ personal perspective and life
experience. When considering the focus of social justice in education, some research was focused on social economic status, race, whether a person or persons have a special need or disability, or geographic location (Cefai et al., 2015; Doucet & Adair, 2013; Kayama et al., 2016; Lee, 2014; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Park, 2011; Santamaría, 2014).

Furthermore, there were clear implications that both teachers and students needed to be involved in the education of social justice and its impact on their lives (Canlas et al., 2015; Ibrahim, 2010; Park, 2011; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004).

Teacher training was also largely emphasized throughout the reviewed literature, where it was felt to have a positive teaching on social justice, teachers needed to have social justice training during their education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Lee (2011) noted, “their definitions and understandings were in conflict with their teaching practices” (p. 17), regarding the student teachers while Kaur (2012) noted there was an increase in the focus given in teacher education programs to social justice and equity. The discussion of teaching with social justice versus teaching the value of social justice also brought to light the idea that to teach social justice, teachers must also believe in it and model this ideal within their classroom. Virtue also was set to task as a teachable quality and found to be important but not always transferred in teacher education programs (Agnew Cochran & Fozard Weaver, 2017), yet compatible with classroom teaching (Taylor, 2015).

The use of qualitative methods proved to be important assessment tools for data collection. In doing so, it was shown how the topic of social justice impacted the classroom, teachers, and students. By having tangible resources, the researcher was able to clearly assess the data and make more specific conclusions. While most of the conclusions made were that more
work is needed to be done in the topic of social justice in education, there was noted growth and a desire to improve (Cazden, 2012; Kaur, 2012; Lee, 2011).

In both mixed method and quantitative research designs, surveys were powerful tools for assessment providing structured data to the researcher. The use of surveys allowed for a clearer scope of information and gave a formal data analysis from a statistical standpoint. In one study, the results were not what was initially expected and led researchers to greater understanding of social justice in school settings (Mitchell et al., 2016). Using surveys, some researchers were able to make substantiated claims on social justice in the classroom.

The literature also led the conversation on various debates within the research community on how best to implement social justice in the classroom. There were noted studies focusing on starting implementation from teacher training courses (Henning, 2013; Kaur, 2012; Lee, 2011), while others felt it started in the classroom but varied from student input (Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Ibrahim, 2010; Park, 2011; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004) to teacher strategies (Bassey, 2016; Dover, 2015; Lageson, 2017; Mistry & Sood, 2015). A clear lack of accountability to students solely based on their age was noticeable as well as a need to begin the discussion and hold students to a higher moral standard at a younger age, as noted by Hawkins (2014) and Henderson (2009). This revelation allowed teachers to begin to understand social awareness in a young child and how their behavior effected the classroom.

The literature also detailed the value and importance of school leadership being aware and willing to allow teachers to instruct and advocate for social justice (Dover, 2015; Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Winterbottom, C. & Winterbottom, S. S., 2017). Research on leadership training (Jayavant, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2010; Santamaría, 2014) provided a niche training and made it possible for leaders to begin their administrative careers with social justice at the
forefront. This type of training provided valuable resources and saved time in advocating for social justice in education as a school with a social justice-oriented leadership would be a strong advocate and be aware of the needs within the classroom.

**Critique of Previous Research**

A critique of previous research gives an opportunity for assessing and evaluating an issue. Social Justice is a multi-faceted topic for discussion and debate that has focused on how children process and understand cultural, racial, and socioeconomic differences. It is a topic that is as relevant now as it was 20, 30, or 50 years ago certainly is cause for further study and analysis.

Ornstein (2017) stated that in America, social justice stemmed from Christianity, such as the New Testament teachings of Jesus:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:35–40 New International Version)

The teachings of Jesus and the foundations of America being based in faith led way to the Bible being a tool used against oppression and discrimination; however, it was not always followed.
American presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, and Bill Clinton made efforts to include human rights in political policies to right the wrong doings of the past (Ornstein, 2017). The 1950s and 1960s in America saw a rise in the pursuit of social justice with the civil rights movement, specifically involving the black community and issues of inequality, poverty, and racial discrimination (Ornstein, 2017). For many there was not much change from slavery to freedom as the treatment of black people was still poor, from segregated public places, inferior treatment, to physical harm, abuse, and even death (Ware, 2013). The rise of popularity on civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. shone a spotlight on the inequalities in America, in a peaceful yet truthful way. Brown vs. Board of Education in 1957 allowed for students of any color to be educated together, although it was initially met with anger and violence (Ware, 2013), by the 1970s, it was a part of the norm. The 1960s lunch counter sit-ins and 1963 March on Washington furthered the voice of the American oppressed (Ware, 2013). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Housing Act of 1968 brought legality to the rights that were being fought for (Ware, 2013). These events, and others, shaped America to what it is today.

There is much research into social justice within the educational scope. The advantages to research spanning multiple focuses has led to greater understanding of how social justice influences different groups within education. While each avenue of research may make different recommendations, each are unified by the goal of advocating and educating for social justice.

Each body of research, by focusing on one area, such as leadership roles; curriculum or pedagogy; teaching strategies; teacher education programs, and student-based experiences have provided a clearer understanding of what is successful and what is lacking in the education of social justice. Within curriculum, there were recommendations to invest in younger learners
(Henderson, 2009), whereas teacher education program study results of equipping teachers would be a more appropriate was to advocate for social justice within the classroom (Bassey, 2016). Studies into social justice within a leadership role advocate for social justice to come from the highest position in the school (Santamaría, 2014) while student-based experiences have shown having students involved led to great success in the understanding and pursuit of social justice (Canlas et al., 2015).

As such, Cochran and Weaver (2017) concluded that the inclusion of information meant to affect positive change, ungraduated students could not be swayed from their biases, especially when based in a cultural or familial context. However, Agarwal et al. (2010) determined that there was change in perception with teachers entering their second and third years of teaching. The difference in these results was based on the context to which they were applied, students studying theory versus teachers practicing the learning, which may lead to further implications on how best to implement social justice within education. With each exploration of how best to provide effective social justice training or implementation strategies, an educator’s knowledge of best practices could be honed and become more accurate in structure.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching strategies have remained at the forefront of research throughout the literature review (Bassey, 2016; Canlas et al., 2015; Cazden, 2012; Dover, 2010; Dover, 2015; Lageson, 2017; Lichty & Palamaro-Munsell, 2017; Marbley et al., 2017; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Winterbottom, C. & Winterbottom, S. S., 2017). The utilized classroom experience, paired with reflective questions, allowed researchers to understand current processes as well as identify future needs. However, many of these studies are localized (Canlas et al., 2015; Dover, 2010: Lageson, 2017; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Winterbottom, C. & Winterbottom, S. S., 2017) and
do not include a wider range of participants, such as at a national or international level, the focus rested on a small pool of schools within a district or closely neighboring districts.

C. Winterbottom and S. S. Winterbottom (2017) noted that while their study was conducted as a multi-case study across two schools, it was not representative of U.K. primary schools as a whole. This understanding, while self-aware, pointed to the issue of pockets of knowledge formed rather than a uniform approach to social justice at a state/provincial or national level. If these small group studies can be pursued at a larger scale, the data collected and analyzed may prove to show the value within the initial small group studies (Creswell, 2013). The research executed by Cefai et al. (2015), covered greater ground and crossed six international borders, reaping results that effected curriculum development across the region.

There was also a divided focus on the age of participants in these studies (Canlas et al., 2015; Cazden, 2012; Dover, 2010; Jayavant, 2016; Lageson, 2017; Lee, 2011; Park, 2011); some research was focused on young children while others focused on students in high school. When analyzing teacher preparation programs, Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) stated teaching for social justice “reflects a central and essential purpose of teaching in a democratic society, wherein the teacher is an advocate for students whose work supports larger efforts for social change” (p. 349). This understanding of a teacher’s role in social justice education may allow teacher preparation programs to evaluate their current methods and revise to improve or encourage greater understanding and methodology involved in teaching for social justice. Although age varied, method and data collection remained quite similar or the same.

When reviewing methodology, researchers valued multiple methods. Qualitative and mixed-method research were greatly utilized, and the personal perspective valued for assessment as many of the methods relied on the participants’ thoughts and feelings during the study. Of the
mixed method strategies, surveys were the most common tool for qualitative data collection and interviews were the most common tool for qualitative data collection. Throughout the literature review, more than seven different methods were used across the literature; although many used one or two methods, several used three or four methods in the research. Of the researchers who used multiple methods (Agarwal et al., 2010; Canlas et al., 2015; Henning, 2013; Ibrahim, 2010; Santamaría, 2014) there were not any greater results or implications for study discovered when compared to those who used fewer methods; however, there was more tangible data to collect and analyze to create a more concrete definition of the effects social justice has in the classroom.

Even with a rich yet troubled history, Americans today still struggle with social justice, equality, and acceptance. Ornstein (2017) stated, “Every generation going forward is obligated to interpret and reinterpret the principles of human rights and justice” (p. 548). It is the role of educators to ensure the values of social justice are understood and advocated for, regardless of the circumstance.

Summary

Chapter 2 reviewed, analyzed, critiqued, and focused on literature related to social justice within the classroom, social justice teaching strategies, teacher preparation programs to include social justice, and teacher pedagogy in relation to social justice. The framework for this chapter relied on the study methods and theories chosen by researchers to study and find a conclusion for the questions they sought to answer. While each research method was utilized, qualitative method was the most common choice for research. Regarding theories, critical race theory was also the most common amongst the literature as it is a significant and valuable theory that bases views of justice on the pre-conceived notions of culture and race (The Writing Lab, 2019).
This review of the literature was a grouping of shared topics and ideas. By learning from what is already known, change for the future can be made. The literature review formed a basis of understanding and guided next steps for future discovery regarding social justice and diversity in education, specifically in the younger years classroom. Through thorough study and analysis of the literature, the review provided a solid foundation and supporting argument to focus on the question of how teaching social justice in the classroom can impact student understanding and effect their awareness of diversity and equality.
Chapter 3: Methodology

International school students face more than just the challenge of living overseas; they must also learn how to navigate their culture, the culture they live in, and the culture of those they meet (Wa-Mbaleka & Ryszewski, 2012). The international school setting allows for a wide variety of opportunities to learn about culture, social justice, diversity, and equality (Schachner, 2019). By planning and implementing an intrinsic case study, it was the goal of this researcher to focus on the teachers’ role in instruction of social justice as well as the advocation of social justice within the classroom. Students entering their primary years, for this study defined as those in Kindergarten to Grade 2 classes, need a foundation of social justice, diversity, and equality to be held accountable to as they move closer to adulthood (James, 2013) in order to be active members of a society that supports diversity, equality, and advocates for social justice themselves.

The teacher’s role is to instruct and inform, assess, and analyze, as well as provide opportunity for social development (Guskey, 2003). Within social development lies social justice, diversity, and equality. Therefore, a teacher’s role is to ensure students have opportunity to understand each of these social components as well as how to apply them within their lives and cultures (Allen & Kelly, 2015). While schools provide the academic curriculum for teachers to use, are teachers prepared to instruct and advocate for social justice within their classroom? This is a question for both the school and individual teacher to be aware of if a solution is to be found.

Research Question

The guiding question for the research was:
• How do Kindergarten to Grade 2 teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in a lower primary setting within a multicultural, international school?

This question stemmed from observations made by the researcher during time spend working at an international school. Within the confines of the international school, there are students, families, and staff from all over the world. Some have lived abroad their whole lives, others are new to the country, and still others have been settled for a period. With the diversity of cultural identity as well as exposure to other cultures, the researcher witnessed a varied approach between students of different cultures; some students relate well to others regardless of cultural background while others remained ethnocentric in their interactions.

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how social justice is taught and advocated for in an international primary school classroom. To effectively understand and glean from a teacher’s experience, an intrinsic case study was chosen as the best way to meet these criteria. More specifically, it was narrowed down to specifically be an intrinsic case study to focus about social justice in the multicultural, international classroom. Baxter and Jack (2010) noted, of the intrinsic case study, “It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest” (p. 548). To gather the data, a focus group meeting, semistructured interviews, and physical artifacts were utilized with teachers who work in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms at an international private school.

Originally, this researcher planned on incorporating observations rather than physical artifacts but due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020), school closures across Asia during February and March 2020 prevented the opportunity
for observations. A secondary contingency was made and physical artifacts by way of values-based lesson plans were substituted as the third data collection piece, once approval to modify the study was obtained from Concordia University–Portland’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The data gathering took place over a period a few months and allowed time for teachers and the researcher to appropriately process and explore the topic of social justice in the classroom as well as self-reflect upon if or how it is woven into everyday teaching strategies.

A case study is an inclusive study of an event or activity that occurs in a natural setting (Harling, 2012). In this case, the natural setting was the international school which at the teachers are currently employed. Within this setting, an intrinsic focus, or a primary interest, was applied. The purpose of an intrinsic case study is to focus on the subject specifically (Harling, 2012); which is the how social justice is instructed and advocated for at an international primary school.

The research “needs to be able to define the uniqueness of this phenomenon which distinguishes it from all others; possibly based on a collection of features or the sequence of events” (Harling, 2012, p. 2). In this, the focus was on the teachers’ response to instructing and advocating for social justice in a lower primary setting within a multicultural, international school. This response was analyzed through specific data from these teachers.

The types of data collection were chosen to provide teachers an opportunity to reflect and focus on how they are impacting their students understanding of social justice, equality, and diversity amongst their peers. Interviews, a focus group meeting, and values-based lesson plans will provide in-depth, data rich details that will create a wide range of information to create a fuller picture (Harling, 2012). Creswell (2013) noted several types of interview options, and for this study, semistructured one-on-one interviews allowed for the participants to be comfortable sharing without others listening. The focus groups were a time for the participants to come
together and share their thoughts and feelings on how they impact social justice within the
classroom and school. Finally, the researcher received values-based lesson plans which allowed
for a tangible reference to a focus within the classrooms and provided more information for
analysis.

Through the study of literature, it was noted that several prior research studies also
utilized the same three qualitative methods to assess data on their topic (Canlas et al., 2015;
Hagerman & Porath, 2018; Henning, 2013; Ibrahim, 2010) while others utilized two of the same
methods, focus groups and interviews (Cefai et al., 2015; Wade, 2007). In these studies, the
focus was split evenly between primary school students (Cefai et al., 2015; Wade, 2007), middle
or high school students (Canlas et al, 2015; Hagerman & Porath, 2018), and adults working in
education (Henning, 2013; Ibrahim, 2010). From Cefai et al. (2015) it was noted the results were
positive in implementing a relevant social justice-based curriculum in multiple schools
internationally. Wade (2007) noted teachers struggled to implement a social justice approach
within a standards-based classroom setting. Each of these studies allowed the researcher to
understand past challenges and successes, as well as understand a clear focus will provide a clear
method for data collection.

**Research Population and Sampling Method**

The study was completed at an International American School in Asia. The curriculum
used the institution is based on the California Common Core Standards for English Language
Acquisition (ELA) and Math, while Next Generation Standards are used for Science and Social
Studies. This chosen curriculum is American based and therefore will be based on American
perspectives, values, and beliefs. There are approximately 170 students in Grades K–2 and
approximately 85 staff from 15 countries, including those from the United States, Canada, Ukraine, Italy, and Australia.

As this was a qualitative study, the sampling method was nonrandom, purposeful sampling of typical case-based participants (McMillan, 2012). Nonrandom meant the participants were specific teachers who were chosen from the population, not randomly selected. They were also purposefully chosen based on their position and how they could impact the study based on understanding and involvement in the study’s target area (Yin, 2009), as they were teaching Kindergarten to Grade 2 students at the focus school during this current school year.

The target population for this study were homeroom teachers of this school, who provide all instruction in English, which is the standard of an American international school. This is also the only common language between all students who attend, although students are at varying levels of mastery. This target group varied in experience, both at the school and teaching in general.

The school where the study took place was in Eastern Asia, in a large metropolitan city of approximately 24 million people. The campus houses three divisions, International (English instruction), Japanese (Japanese instruction), and Korean (Korean instruction). These three divisions have separate curriculums and teaching staff, except for specials teachers—includes art, pottery, dance, computers, PE, and music—and the Head of School, who oversees all divisions. Within the divisions, there approximately 850 students, from nursery to Grade 12, with primary (K–5) being comprised of approximately 300 students. There is a designated English Language Development program for students who need greater support understanding and acquiring the English language, as well as a Learning Support program for students with
academic and developmental needs. Both the English Language Development and Learning Support programs support the international division.

**Instrumentation**

For this study, three data collection methods were used. First, focus groups were held with the participating teachers to elicit a group discussion on social justice and what teachers saw as their role in instruction and advocation of social justice. The focus group meeting outline and general schedule was based on Krueger’s (2002) “Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews” as this researcher felt it was a suitable template for focus group instruction.

Second, a semistructured interview was conducted between the participant and the researcher. The participants had two weeks to make an appointment to meet for the interview, with reminders set at 1 week and 10 days for those who had not yet made an appointment. The questions within the interview expanded on the focus group content, to allow each participant to be able to provide further or greater detail than she may have within the group or give opportunity to share something she was not comfortable expressing in the focus group setting.

Third, the researcher collected the physical artifacts of the values-based lesson plans for the Kindergarten to Grade 2 grade level from the teacher who implemented these lessons into the curriculum. The period for these lesson plans will focus on the same time originally planned for the observations, as well as the focus groups and semistructured interviews. Lesson plans were collected for the December to March period, which included six lesson plans per grade level, totaling 18 lesson plans in all. Review and analysis of these lesson plans give the researcher opportunity to investigate how the teacher incorporates the content in her classroom. As the researcher is a direct supervisor for the participating teachers, there was clarity and specific instruction that the data collected for this study was not used in evaluating them as a part of their
employment; the expectation was that this study was to be seen as outside the scope of their contract and would not affect renewal in any way.

**Data Collection**

For an intrinsic case study, the purpose is to better comprehend the subject or situation. As such, using multiple qualitative data collection methods provided a purposeful sampling that allowed the researcher to gain greater understanding. Within this study, the three methods of data collection chosen were a focus group, an interview, and physical artifacts. These methods are appropriate in discussing social justice within the classroom as they pose an opportunity for the participant to respond personally and allow for processing and reflection on the teacher’s role in social justice in the classroom.

To request participation, a brief meeting was held after a department meeting detailing the study and its parameters to the teachers two weeks prior to the study start date. The teachers’ response was given verbally or via messaging app confirming she would participate in the study. Of the teachers who participated, a group chat on a common messaging app was created for the researcher to efficiently send details on times and dates for confirmation of availability or revisal of proposed times and dates.

Throughout the study the participants remained the same, no participants stood down at any point in the study. As no participants stood down, no new participants were chosen, the study continued as originally planned. The focus groups met in a pre-determined and neutral location, where all participants were comfortable and a place where there were no interruptions. The meetings allowed the teachers to share thoughts and ideas on how they each instruct and advocate for social justice within the classroom as well as provide opportunity to challenge and support each other’s views on the topic. The researcher moderated the group independently and
opened the session with a greeting and setting of guidelines. Once the guidelines were set, the questions began. The questions were written in an open-ended style to ensure participants would have opportunity to give more than “yes” or “no” responses. The focus groups were audio recorded using the researcher’s mobile phone and later transcribed for clarity by the researcher. See Appendix A for the outline and questions. The interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon location on campus. The interviews were audio-recorded using the researcher’s mobile phone and later transcribed by the researcher. See Appendix B for the interview questions.

The physical artifacts were gathered by the researcher via email. The teacher who implemented the curriculum into the primary department send the lesson plans as well as the PDF curriculum from the original Australian Education website. As the lesson plans were modified versions of the original curriculum due to current location time constraints and nothing new was added, only the lesson plans were analyzed.

All data collection was completed over a period of two months, less than the original plan of one trimester due to school closures. The initial collection was from the focus group session and was audio recorded on a mobile phone then transcribed on a computer by the researcher. Participants participated in transcript review and were offered the opportunity to read the transcripts to add or amend what was recorded. These initial notes, as well as any amendments, were collected and kept on the researcher’s personal data device.

Once the interviews are conducted, the researcher also kept the data on a personal data device which was password protected to maintain privacy and confidentiality. If the researcher had a question regarding clarity of response, she asked the participant to clarify for further understanding. The interview transcripts were kept, along with any notations added for clarity
and understanding. Lesson Plans were also be kept on the researcher’s personal data device and utilized for reflection and further understanding.

Each participant was given a number for identification, to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The researcher kept an initial list with name and identifying number if she needed to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. At the end of the study, the list, as well as any other data, were stored in the researcher’s home in a locked case only accessible to the researcher and confidentiality was kept. All documents will be destroyed after 3 years.

**Identification of Attributes**

To consider how teachers can instruct and advocate for social justice in the classroom, the following attributes were developed in this research study: social justice in education, diversity, equality, instruct, advocacy, teacher perspective, opportunity for growth, and culture. These attributes were assigned to the topic of social justice within the scope of this study and used as definitions throughout the research.

The study location was not specifically unique to international schools but was unique when compared to mainstream American schools. The diversity within an international school creates a much more obvious visually diverse appearance as there is no one culture for students to assimilate into. There becomes a blended school culture that allows students to maintain their values and customs while sharing in other customs and experiences. The daily engagement with diversity allows students to shift their perspective to begin to understand one another. Teachers are the ones who can facilitate student growth from within the classroom.

Teacher perspective and opportunity for growth were not specifically defined terms as they can be objective. In this study, perspective meant the opinion or idea stemming from the teacher’s own thoughts, ideas, or experiences and opportunity for growth means an area where a
teacher felt she could improve on her instruction and/or advocacy of social justice within the classroom. Each of these attributes were pertinent to the study as they laid a foundation for understanding and discovery.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

As the case study employed qualitative methods, assessment was based on each collection type, interviews, focus groups, and physical artifacts. Priya (2014) noted the use of these types of data collection allow the researcher to have a deeper awareness and expand their knowledge of the topic of study. She also noted the need for patience and attention to detail to ensure an objective study, and that its effectiveness as a research methodology is so broadly recognized that is utilized in a variety of social sciences (Priya, 2014). Three data collection types were chosen to ensure the topic did not end up too broad, with too many data collection points, therefore binding the study to ensure a reasonably conducted study would be conducted (Baxter & Jack, 2010).

As the researcher had a professional association with the school, teachers were reassured that what was said in the interviews was confidential and would not be shared publicly nor would it affect annual review. The intention of the interview was to allow each teacher to share their feelings without their peers’ present. Specific questions were given, no other questions were asked, based on the teacher’s response. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The researcher used teacher numbers to identify each teacher interview transcript. Once the transcripts were completed, it was sent to the teachers to confirm accuracy of the statements. If the teacher had a problem with the transcript, she emailed the researcher the error or clarification for the researcher to review and revise as necessary.
Once the transcripts were completed and reviewed for accuracy, data analysis began. The researcher used the framework method, as it is a common choice used in qualitative research across many fields (Parkinson, Eatough, Holmes, Stapley, & Midgley, 2015) and notably more effective when there is much text-based data collected (Hackett & Strickland, 2018). The framework method “provides clear steps to follow and produces highly structured outputs of summarized data” (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013, p. 2). It provided an ability for the researcher to review key components of the data to look at commonalities and trends. Coding of common words and phrases were categorized and attention to similar ideals or perspectives were noted. Gale et al. (2013) also noted in qualitative analysis there is, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the project, ongoing interplay between data collection, analysis, and theory development” (p. 4); as such, the framework method was key in organizing and building on current knowledge.

There are seven stages involved with using the framework method—transcription, familiarization, coding, creating a framework, applying the framework, charting data, and interpretation (Gale et al., 2013). As mentioned, once the data were collected, transcribed, member checked, and coded, the framework was built. This began with the development of coding categories found within the data (Gale et al., 2013).

When developing the framework, the categories were chosen based on common codes and labels and reworked as new data were added until all data had been incorporated, including a category for data that was not suitable under the set category headings (Gale et al., 2013). By applying the framework, the researcher manually indexed the text data, for both the focus group and interview transcripts as well as physical artifacts, using the codes created when developing the framework (Gale et al., 2013). The coding used was theme or topic based as it focused on
patterns within the data (Saldaña, 2009). It took data that was relevant to the research question and placed in the appropriate code category (Saldaña, 2009). In this way, the data were organized and able to be understood by the reader.

Once indexing was complete, the data were charted. This meant “summarizing the data by category from each transcript. Good charting requires an ability to strike a balance between reducing the data on the one hand and retaining the original meanings and ‘feel’ of the interviewees’ words on the other” (Gale et al., 2013, p. 5). This charting method allowed for a clear layout and presentation of the data.

Once the framework was charted, the data were then interpreted. This process was the key and final step to completing the data analysis process using the framework method. The findings at this stage provided descriptions, analysis, answers to the research question, and was used to decipher next steps or future considerations along this field of study (Gale et al., 2013).

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

When considering a research study project, both limitation and delimitations must be considered. Creswell (2013) noted various limitations and delimitations can affect a study, and the data collection type can play a role in the validity and depth of data collection. While considering each data collection method within this study, limitations and delimitations were noted.

**Limitations.** Limitations are conditions or circumstances that may affect or restrict a study (Lund Research Ltd, 2012). In this study, limitation considerations included time constraints and participation as each of these had the potential to negatively affect the study in separate ways. Time constraints were an issue due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak causing school closures across Asia and the researcher not being able to use observations as a data
collection method. However, there were no time constraints when working with participants, as times booked for both focus groups and the individual semistructured interviews were set with minor adjustments. Participation was not an issue because all the teachers participated in the study, although as the research design had a small sample size, not having full participation would have been unfavorable and greatly limiting to the data.

To encourage and ensure participation, the researcher very clearly explained the purpose and responsibilities of the study as well as assured the teachers their participation would not affect their job status or take away from their regular duties. By considering the teacher workload and schedule, the researcher proposed times during the day she was certain there was no conflict with teaching periods, pre-set meetings, or obligations. This was to ensure there was credibility and dependability within the study, and that an ethic standard was practiced and maintained.

**Delimitations.** In this study the boundaries were set at the Kindergarten to Grade 2 grade level, as the researcher was keen to understand how a teacher’s instruction and advocation of social justice in the classroom impacted young students in the lower primary years. Only the homeroom teachers were selected as they spent the most amount of time with their students, when compared to the specials, foreign language, and English Language Development teachers. By using the three specific qualitative data collection methods, interviews, focus group, and physical artifacts notes, the researcher did not focus on quantitative or mixed method approaches as this intrinsic case study was focused on the subject specifically (Harling, 2012) and it was felt that using qualitative methods best fit this model.

**Validation**

It was important to be transparent with the findings of any research study, and validation is used to ensure this is done correctly. Creswell (2013) noted "multiple strategies for validation
are necessary to demonstrate the accuracy of the information” (p. 237). Within this study, validation and credibility were ensured using specific strategies.

**Credibility.** The use of many data collection strategies is a characteristic of case studies which enriches the credibility of a study (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003, as cited by Baxter & Jack, 2010). To ensure reliable credibility, several trustworthiness strategies were applied to the research study (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985, as cited by Shenton, 2004). Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) stated that, “The trustworthiness of results is the bedrock of high-quality qualitative research” (p. 1802). In this study, three strategies were used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

**Transcript review.** First, transcript review took place as each participant reviewed the collected data once it was transcribed. The participants received the transcript electronically via email and were asked to review the content of the content within the transcripts (Birt et al., 2016). Upon approval from each member, the transcripts were considered final copies and data analysis began.

**Member checking.** Second, member checking was applied as the participants reviewed the analysis and conclusions made from the data collection and they confirmed the results (McMillan, 2012). This took place to allow for accuracy of results and gave opportunity for participants to make comments on the results. Once all data collection was analyzed, opportunity for member checking was applied.

**Thick and rich description.** Third, and finally, a thick and rich description, which “would entail describing fully the participants of the study without compromising anonymity” (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 546), was maintained to ensure rich detail and engagement with the data. Shenton (2004) stated that this insight will allow for the conclusion to be understood by a reader
as well as ensure the results make sense and have a clear conclusion. Compared to quantitative research which reports the facts, qualitative research must set the tone for the reader by giving enough detail and description to allow the reader to feel as though they are there and involved in the action (Lewis, 2009). The thick description must be weighted in detail.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time (Shenton, 2004), therefore set guidelines and procedures were established prior to the start of the study to ensure each participant was given the same information and opportunity; the researcher ensured all data were collected and analyzed in the same way. Writing out the procedure will ensure a comprehensive guideline will be followed (Priya, 2014).

The use of triangulation for these strategies; focus group, interviews, and physical artifacts to ensure credibility, further established assurance of dependability. When looking at the literature, many examples were found. Canlas et al. (2015) found that while both focus group and interview data collection methods were useful, interaction with students during interviews were most fruitful as it allowed them to build relationships and gain trust which in turn led to students’ being more willing to share with them. Cefai et al. (2015) obtained the richest data from teacher reflection diaries as teachers processed more deeply on their own; yet the interviews helped glean more concise data from the teacher focus group on the specific positives and areas of growth for the curriculum that was implemented.

**Expected Findings**

The expected findings were that teachers would not realize if they are instructing or advocating for social justice within the classroom. The researcher felt if they have been exposed to a multicultural classroom environment, they had a general understanding of how to work within the cultures and have created a system to allow for cultural differences to be maintained.
while keeping strong classroom management without necessarily using the label of social justice advocacy. The researcher also expected to find some teachers unable to see the value in instructing or advocating for social justice within the classroom due to not understanding its importance or not feeling it appropriate with students within the chosen age range as they may feel it is topic better suited for older students. Also, the researcher expected to find that the teachers would not see the purpose of making additional effort of focusing on social justice as they felt their workload was already heavy enough with the curriculum that takes much of the instructional time (Clapper & Young, 2014), as well as additional school-related projects and events that cut into instructional time at different point in the school year. The information the researcher gathered was beneficial to understanding how social justice was instructed and advocated for and became a baseline for further teaching strategies or in-service trainings to be completed with teachers in the future.

Ethical Issues in the Study

When research is undertaken, there are many aspects to be considered, especially the ethics of the study. Major principles to be considered are harm coming to the participants, keeping confidentiality, guaranteeing privacy, ensuring cognizant consent, building relationships, insensitivity, professionalism and boundaries, data analysis and data rights (Lichtman, 2010). Each principle needs not only to be considered prior to beginning a research study, but also during data collection.

Conflict of interest assessment. There was minimal conflict of interest with this study. The researcher was a professional associate of the school chosen for this study and the teachers were under direct supervision by the researcher. While professional relationships were maintained, an invitation to be a part of the study might have been considered a directive rather
than a request. To ensure all participants felt they had the right to choose, specific information regarding the purpose and details of the study was given, as well as an assurance that their choice to participate would not affect their employment status or annual review. This reassurance was given in writing to maintain transparency of the study as well as provide a tangible reassurance that participation in the study would not affect employment status. The data collected was confidential and kept off site on the researcher’s personal data device and analyzed based solely within the parameters of the research question.

**Researcher’s position.** The pursuit of this topic as research stemmed from the researcher’s time and experience in the early years and lower primary classrooms. This experience allowed the researcher to see the start of children’s attitudes and opinions of others from an early age. This was something which needed more focus and dissection. To complete this study, interacting with primary teachers on their roles of instructing and advocating for social justice and analysis physical artifacts was key.

The role of researcher allowed the teachers’ schedules and time to be a priority as not to inconvenience them when focusing on the study. As the researcher was sole transcriber and connection to the participants, it allowed for clear communication and an assurance appointments or messages were not forgotten or missed. The teachers did not receive any financial compensation for participating, nor did they receive higher scores than earned on the annual summative review.

**Ethical issues in the study.** de Vaus (2001, as cited by Priya, 2014) noted there are a higher number of ethical issues when completing a case study compared to other studies as there are more strategies used to collect data. To ensure the study was carried out ethically and to high standard, permission from Concordia University–Portland’s IRB for the use of human subjects
was obtained. Permission from the Head of Schools to complete tasks and meetings during school hours was also obtained. Once these approvals were received, the researcher approached the candidates for participation in the study. Once the participants had decided, consent forms were issued for signing. Each participant was given a consent form after the initial meeting and allowed 48 hours to decide and submit the signed form before they were able to participate in the study. As all forms were collected, the researcher began data collection. The forms were stored in the researcher’s home in a locked case only accessible to the researcher and will be destroyed after 3 years. The electronic audio data were kept on the researcher’s personal data device and destroyed at completion of the study while the written transcripts of focus groups and individual interviews will be kept for three years also in the researcher’s home in a locked case only accessible to the researcher.

Summary

This chapter introduced and reviewed the methodology and intrinsic case study design utilized in discovering how teachers in an international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms instructed and advocated for social justice. The sections within this chapter explained the purpose, participants, methods, and data collection methods. It described the framework method (Gale et al., 2013) and how it pertained to data analysis in qualitative research intrinsic case studies. It showed how the data were utilized and analyzed to create an understanding of the study as well as any future implications.

This chapter also described the credibility methods of transcript review, member checking, as well as thick and rich description. It reviewed the validity of the study, and any limitations or delimitations in the research design as well as expected findings. Finally, it reviewed the ethics of the study and provided a conflict of interest assessment.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter contains the results of an intrinsic case study focused on answering the question, “How do Kindergarten to Grade 2 teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in a lower primary setting within a multicultural, international school?” The purpose of this study was to discover how homeroom teachers view social justice within their classroom and how they advocate or instruct to bring social justice to the awareness of the students, whether through words or actions. This qualitative research study data were examined through the attributes of social justice in education, diversity, equality, instruct, advocacy, teacher perspective, opportunity for growth, and culture as noted in Chapter 3. In this study, the research question was addressed through focus groups and interviews with teachers as well as the review of physical artifacts, and examination of values-based lesson plans.

The components of this chapter provide the results of the research by describing the data collection methods and the method of analysis, the framework method. Hackett and Strickland (2017) considered this type of evaluation and analysis of data to be an efficient approach to the data and a structured format to follow to ensure the data analysis allows for thorough and documented interpretation. These results suggest that teachers do instruct and advocate for social justice in numerous ways. The results and conclusion will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Description of the Sample

Research population. This single case study was conducted at a selected school located in Asia. It is an international American school using American Common Core curriculum. It is a self-contained school, there are no collaborating schools and there is not district it is a part of, although it is not the only international American school in the city. It serves the Nursery to
Grade 12 levels with a diverse population which is predominately Asian. The case study focused solely on homeroom teachers who taught within the Kindergarten to Grade 2 level.

The participant pool in this study was limited to eight primary school teachers, who were all homeroom teachers within the Kindergarten to Grade 2 grade levels. All the participants chose to join the study on a volunteer basis, they made an informed choice to be a part of the study, understanding there was no personal or professional gains to be made. They also joined understanding their participation, or lack of, would not affect their employment status or annual review. The personal information of these participants was kept confidentially, they were assigned numbers for identification purposes and signed permission forms prior to any participation (see Appendix D).

While it was not a criteria requirement, as all the teachers in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 homerooms were female, the participant pool was made up of all females. If there was need to request participants from another academic subject area due to lack of participation from homeroom teachers, the other three potential participants would also have been female as no males were employed in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 levels at the time of this study. However, they were not included in the study as all eight homeroom teachers agreed to be participants.

Table 1

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<th>Participant</th>
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The teaching experience varied amongst the participants, as well as length of time at current school. One of the participants had less than one-year teaching experience, four had two–four years teaching experience, and three had four to six years teaching experience. Regarding length of time at current location, four were in their first year at location, three were in second-fourth year at location, and one was in their fifth year at location.

The ethnicity of the participants was diverse. Six of the participants were Caucasian and two were African American. The participants represented four different countries as well: Canada, the United States, Australia, and Italy. Ages of the participants ranged from 24–39 years of age.

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study, more specifically an intrinsic case study. It, and the selected setting, were chosen for this study as they were considered most appropriate to better understand the subject. Regarding intrinsic case studies, Baxter and Jack (2010) stated, “It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because
it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest” (p. 548). This case study is of great interest to those interested in social justice as well as those in education as the results can be used to further understand teachers’ perspectives on social justice in an international lower primary classroom. This intrinsic case study was completed over two months, through thoughtful planning and cooperation between the researcher and participants.

Within this case study, of the three data collection methods originally chosen, one needed to be changed due to the 2020 Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic. Originally, focus groups, semistructured interviews, and observations were to be conducted over a four-month period, but due to school closures across Asia, observations were unable to be completed. As such, they were replaced with physical artifacts, which were values-based lesson plans. These lesson plans used for data collection were not based on the American common core standards, but rather an Australian Education system production called Rights, Resilience & Respectful Relationships which was created to encourage “social and emotional learning and respectful relationships” (Cahill et al., 2018a, p. 1). One of the teachers in the primary department, also a participant, proposed this curriculum for the school last year so it was the first year of implementation. These lesson plans were in addition to the monthly character lesson plans taught in each classroom by the primary guidance counsellor.

Each data method was chosen for a particular purpose. Focus groups were chosen to allow participants to join together and discuss social justice in an open and safe forum; to discuss their thoughts and ideas, and to communicate if and how they felt social justice was instructed and advocated for within their classrooms and within the school itself. “Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information,
when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other” (Creswell, 2013, p. 164). Due to participant schedules and availability, the initial single focus group was split into two separate focus groups. Seven of the eight participants were able to participate in a focus group session, with the eighth unavailable due to illness on both scheduled days and therefore did not participate in this round of data. The six questions of the focus group gave participants opportunity to share what they felt about social justice in education, how they felt they instructed or advocated for social justice, if they felt there was opportunity at the current location, and any other social-justice based thoughts or opinions that were shared stemming from the questions or conversation (see Appendix A).

The semistructured interviews allowed all eight participants to spend more time discussing instruction and advocation of social justice within the classroom after having time to reflect on what was said in the previous focus group meetings. While Creswell (2013) noted, “The less articulate, shy interviewee may present the researcher with a challenge and less than adequate data” (p. 164), this was not the case as the participants were comfortable and articulate during interviews. There were eight questions that allowed them to continue the discussion connected from the thoughts and ideas brought up in the groups as well as discuss their own individual ideas, observations, values, and beliefs (see Appendix B). The personal time and private setting allowed each participant to be assured their privacy was maintained and their time was valued.

Values-based lesson plans were collected from the participant responsible for implementing them into the primary department, as she was head teacher of the lower primary section. The participant provided two sets of documents. First, the actual published document from the Australian Education system production called Rights, Resilience & Respectful
Relationships, and second, a planned lesson plan format to condense the published document to meet the time requirements of the school for these lessons, as well as to set an annual schedule and to ensure there were no duplication of lessons between grade levels. The goal was to incorporate these values-based lessons plans into classroom activities twice per month. As such, the lessons plans from December to March were analyzed for this study.

Focus group and interviews were audio-recorded using the researcher’s personal cell phone. It was tested prior to use to ensure range and functionality were enough to conduct the meetings. As the focus group and interview data were collected on audio files, transcription was essential to ensure accuracy of content. Transcripts were sent to participants to allow them opportunity to clarify their words as well as give approval of what was transcribed. Once all participants gave feedback and approval, data analysis using the framework method began.

![Five-step process in the framework analysis](image)

The framework method for data analysis was chosen for this qualitative study as it is a clearly formatted method that allows a streamlined approach to careful and structured data analysis (Gale et al., 2013). The stages were completed in a timely manner, and transcription was completed manually after the recordings were first converted to text with a computer-generated transcription program. Once the program created the transcripts, the researcher listened while reading to label participant voices, correct errors, grammar, and format the text into a readable script. There were two incidents where the researcher could not understand a word spoken by a participant. In both cases, the researcher copied the whole audio file and cut the copy down into a 10–15 second file of just the sentence the participant spoke so the participant would not have to search the entire file for a single sentence. The researcher then sent it to the participant to see if they could identify their own words. Once the correct word was confirmed, the researcher amended the transcripts. These scripts were completed for the two focus group recordings and the eight semistructured interview recordings. The participants were then sent soft copies to review their input and ensure it was accurate.

Researcher familiarization means taking time to know the data, to be familiar with the content and materials by re-reading transcripts or listening to recordings multiple times (Gale et al., 2013). It took place while reading and re-reading the transcripts and lesson plans, and continued while coding, creating the analytical framework, applying said framework, and charting the data. When coding, the researcher kept the codes and corresponding colors in an excel document that was available during document coding in the Word documents. Although colors were set arbitrarily and there were no set colors for specific codes, the colors were used consistently with the same code. An inductive approach was taken with the data coding, meaning codes were created as the text was read and taken from the data, allowing the analysis to closely
match the content (Braun & Clarke, 2012) As a deductive approach was not used, there were no preset codes formulated prior to beginning the coding process. Documents were read and reviewed several times during coding and portions of text were re-labeled as more codes were developed or clarified. Once coding was complete, there were 26 codes in total, coding 558 sentences or phrases.

Figure 3. Themes, subthemes, and corresponding codes.

From the codes, a framework was created, and definitions were created by the researcher (except one as the definition of social justice was quite clear from the cited source) to provide insight to the choice of each code word and given for each code to ensure clarity of meaning and uniformity within codes (see Appendix E). Once descriptions were completed, codes were hand categorized based on concept and relatability of description. From the 26 codes, six subthemes or categories were created, although each subtheme did not contain the same number of codes. From these subthemes, three main themes were determined, as overarching topics stemming
from the data collected and analyzed. Once the total number of codes were tallied and separated into the three main themes, the researcher took the code totals from each theme and divided against the total using a calculator. These results indicated that 62% of all coded data pertained to the Communication theme, 26% of all coded data pertained to the Perspective theme, and 12% of all coded data pertained to the Equality theme.

![Pie chart showing frequencies of themes](image)

*Figure 4. Frequency of themes discovered during data analysis.*

The application of the framework included the creation of an excel document to chart frequency of codes used within each document and grouping these numbers into each subtheme and main theme. Once this was complete, the charting of data into the framework matrix was completed by placing all coded data into an excel spreadsheet based on which document it came from. Upon completion, the researcher reviewed each code column to ensure the data within was in the correct column. This process of reviewing 558 coded sections resulted in moving 70 data pieces into different code columns that better suited the data. After the revision of the matrix, the codes were checked to ensure the number of codes in the matrix was equal to the number of codes initially found in the frequency chart and coded to the correct columns. Once all these steps had been taken, the data were ready for interpretation.
Table 2

*Code to Subtheme Ratio and Quantity*

<table>
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<th>Participant ID/Subthemes</th>
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As in the framework method, each subtheme was reviewed, and connections were made with the codes within. Table 2 shows the code to subtheme ratio amongst participants as well as the amount of times each code was recorded within the data. Using a template based on Gale et al. (2013), the subtheme, definition, codes, summary of data (including direct quotes from data), unexpected findings, and points for further consideration were created in a word document. This summary style of interpretation allowed the enormous volume of data to be condensed into a manageable form to allow clarity of purpose, analysis, and future considerations.

**Summary of the Findings**

The data discussed in this section denotes the information gathered from three different data types: focus groups, semistructured interviews, and values-based lesson plans. With each type, inductive coding was completed with all data as it was analyzed through using the framework method. Within this method, the data were taken in its raw form and processed into a matrix of cross-referenced and collated data than was then interpreted and summarized in tables for each subtheme. For each subtheme, relevant data and results were arranged to include
summary, participant quotes, unexpected content, and further considerations (see template in Appendix F). During focus groups and individual interviews, the participants discussed and described how they felt about social justice, how it pertained to education, and how they instructed or advocated for social justice in their classrooms. The thoughts and dialogue that came from the seven participants during focus group discussion and the eight participants during individual interviews, along with the physical artifacts, created the basis for data analysis.

These discussion points formed three overarching themes discovered in the data: communication, equality, and perspective. Teachers were concerned about social justice issues and their abilities to implement appropriate strategies or tools, and whether they can influence their students in a positive way. Participants felt that social justice was important not only in education, but in life. That while young students did not fully understand the gravity of social justice, they could understand social justice concepts at their developmental level. Teachers would need to approach the topic of social justice in an appropriate manner to ensure students not only understood but were able to apply and use the skills and strategies taught to them in the real world. Allen and Kelly (2015) stated, “Interrelationships among different kinds of skills and abilities contribute to young children’s acquisition of content knowledge and competencies, which form a foundation for later academic success” (p. 107). Participants also strongly felt self-reflection was a key skill as without the ability to self-reflect, it would be difficult to assess whether students were understanding concepts taught, or just doing as the teacher asked. The data also had some key word or phrases that were the same, or similar, across each theme showing direct correlation to the topic and the research question.

**Presentation of the Data and Results**
When this researcher initially met with the candidates to explain the study and ask for their participation, the all were very receptive and willing. It was clearly expressed that it was voluntary, the expectations involved, and that their decision to participate or not would have no impact on their employment status or annual review. After meeting with them, permission forms were distributed for candidates to review, sign, and return to the researcher. As an efficient method for communication, a messaging app was used to create a group chat for just the participants and researcher. This allowed meetings to be set quickly and efficiently as well as answer any questions about time, date, and/or location of meetings. Moving forward, it was also used to update the group when the researcher sent emails that required participant feedback although no data were collected within this app.

**Focus groups.** Due to illness on the part of a few of the participants, one specific date could not be chosen, so there were two focus group meeting times set. At each of these meetings, the same introduction and questions were asked, and they were both audio-recorded. When the meetings began, the researcher thanked each participant for being willing to join the study to help further the understanding of instruction and advocacy of social justice in the international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom. Before beginning the meeting and recording, the researcher confirmed all consent forms had been signed and submitted.

Once focus group one began, the participants were initially quiet, and the first question contained a definition which they asked the researcher if they could read it after it was asked as it was quite lengthy and difficult to remember. The researcher made a mental note to offer focus group two the same opportunity to read the definition once the question was read. After reading the definition within the first question, some participants struggled to understand some parts of the definition and needed clarification from the researcher so they could effectively answer the
question. Upon clarification, the participants seemed more at ease and the meeting ran smoothly, with few moments of silence as participants pondered each question, and a healthy dialogue between participants as they discussed each aspect as a group.

Focus group two ran very similarly, although there was no need to explain the definition within the first questions, there were many silences and pauses during the meeting, extending the time of the meeting, but not going beyond the expected time set. Both focus groups had teachers from all three grade levels, the researcher did not divide based on any criteria, but allowed the participants to choose which meeting best fit their schedule.

**Semistructured interviews.** After the focus group meetings, the researcher set times with each participant to conduct the individual interview. Each participant set a time that was convenient for their schedule and when the researcher was available. Set locations were chosen for privacy and confidentiality. The researcher asked that all interviews be completed within a two-week period, as the school would be closing for a holiday after that time. The interview questions were to follow up from the focus group and to allow each participant opportunity to share thoughts and feelings in a safe, private space. Each participant was contemplative and took her time when answering questions or asking for clarification. These interviews were completed in less than 30 minutes each. At the end of each interview, the researcher thanked the participant for her time and informed that observations would begin after the holiday break. However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, schools remained closed for longer than expected causing the researcher to replace observations with physical artifacts.

**Physical artifacts: Values-based lesson plans.** At the beginning of the school year, values-based lesson plans were implemented in the primary program, Kindergarten to Grade 5. These plans were implemented to reinforce the school’s learning outcomes and provide a focus
on social-emotional learning. The implemented curriculum was an Australian Education system production called *Rights, Resilience & Respectful Relationships*. The participants were given the original document for their grade level as well as a time-modified lesson plan to incorporate into the current curriculum, as a supplement to develop social-emotion skills and awareness. For this study, lesson plans for the period of the planned research, December to March, were chosen for each grade level. The lesson plans were entered as data, analyzed, and interpreted using the framework method, along with the focus group and interview transcripts. As the lesson plans were a physical artifact, there was no need to participants to be involved in the data collection.

**Main Themes**

From these three data collection methods, the 26 codes were found. Once all coding was complete, the codes were compiled into lists, based on same or similar characteristics. These lists became six categories of codes, connected and compatible. After reviewing each set of codes in the categories, the researcher then set the categories as subthemes and combined them to create three overarching themes from those subthemes, based on shared properties.

Within each of these themes, the participants shared stories and opinions about each topic, using the questions to spurn them towards deeper reflection and responses, and allowing them to produce constructive responses and have a healthy exchange. The next section will break down the participants’ thoughts and ideas by theme. It will begin with the theme that was found to be most code-heavy and contained more than half of all coded sections. It will then go to the second code-heavy theme, and finish with the final theme.

During data analysis and interpretation, there were also several unexpected findings. These were participant comments, opinion, or perspectives that differed from the rest of the group and gave the researcher a different perception of the issue. Within each of the three
overarching themes, interaction, perspective, and equality, came certain findings that stood out in the data. With each of these cases, certain rationales were constructed.

**Theme 1: Communication**

The overarching theme communication was created from pairing the two subthemes interaction and instruction (see Table 1 for codes within this subtheme). These two subthemes were the largest and had the most codes total, 347 combined. Within the interaction subtheme, there were five separate codes with a combined total of 197 coded pieces throughout the data, and the instruction subtheme had eight codes with a combined total of 150 coded pieces throughout the data. As such, this was a full and rich theme.

**Subtheme: Interaction.** The definition given to interaction by the researcher for this study was, “Interaction with another person through words or actions, to relay information, work together, or inform of understanding.” The researcher designated this meaning as an encompassment of the code definitions within the subtheme. This subtheme was a large focus of the discussions amongst the participants.

Participants agreed opportunity needed to be given for students to learn to problem solve, communicate, and cooperate. They felt that many students lacked the skills to independently problem solve which led to stress and frustration. One participant stated she finds the most common fit and goes from there. It was important that students needed to understand there are many ways to problem solve, and they need to decide how to solve a problem, as well as who they can ask for help. To build relationships with peers, students also need to learn how to relate to each other and respond in an appropriate manner. There was an awareness that exposure to and achievement of these skills will lead to students having a greater understanding of the world around them and provide useful strategies to maneuver within it. The values-based lesson plans
for Kindergarten students offered scenarios for students to practice problem solving, keeping the situations relevant and age appropriate, as well as providing questions for teachers to ask to help build understanding, communication, and collaboration (Cahill et al., 2018a).

When discussing cross-cultural barriers, participants felt that it was important to understand culture and differences when communicating, even though it could be difficult building relationships with those from another cultures, these exchanges were making students more educated. Talking about values, explaining meanings, providing clear expectations, and showing students how to use their voice as a tool to problem solve or respond appropriately was a way that participants felt will help students communicate successfully and positively. By being open and upfront, students will ask if they don’t understand and by keeping an open dialogue, educators can discuss a variety of social justice-related topics like diversity in a safe classroom environment.

Each participant also felt it that language could build or break relationships. By encouraging students to be a team, work together, and immerse themselves as a group, over time they can integrate and build positive relationships that can break the language barrier. As the school uses English as the expected language for communication while students are at school, two participants felt that pushing the language expectation would help foster relationships while another two felt it was not fair to force a student to speak English all day, especially when they struggle with the language.

This divide on permitting students to speak their home language at school was even amongst focus group two participants, and while Participant Seven felt making a student speak English could be considered oppressive and Participant Six did admit she would allow same language students to speak in their home language during lunch and recess times but not during
class time, the other two participants maintained a firm belief that language accountability was beneficial for growth as well as to maintain parent expectation. Based on “[d]iffering perceptions of what social justice meant, from changing individual perspectives to undertaking specific actions, led to uneven levels of commitment” (Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 10), and could cause conflict. If common language is a method to provide equality and as such to be considered a social justice issue, then participants not sharing same views will not allow for a smooth transition between grades if expectation and participation in social justice is not uniform.

Participant Four mentioned many parents expect a certain level of language growth and development, and, as she stated,

I find that their parents are really nervous, not only are they not speaking English, but I find that they want to make sure that they’re speaking English with an American tone. So often I’ll even have parents say, but do they sound like they are Japanese, or do they sound like they’re Korean speaking English?

There is pressure from home and school for students to conform.

Participants were quick to note that at this age of 5 to 8 years old, students are receptive, open sponges who want to know what is right, and by sharing a common idea they can show understanding through words and action. Values such as compassion, communication, and confidence are also important to instill in students. As students continue to develop a stronger sense of right and wrong, understanding will become more important. They need to understand that some things are not fair and challenge them by asking to understand and using self-reflection to evaluate personal understanding.

A participant of focus group one stated, “The reflection means that you not just telling them they’re actually thinking about it and how they will act on it rather than this is what the
teacher said, and it has no meaning to me. Rather building up to have meaning for them.” While most participants felt this way, a participant felt that students really do not understand social justice at all, and that she herself does not fully understand. While not completely uncommon to not be educated on or aware of specific definitions, this could also be due to lack of exposure in previous experiences on the part of the participant.

**Subtheme: Instruction.** For this study, instruction was defined as, “Teaching or instruction to students, based on needs and values, with a focus on advocating for rights, holding others accountable, and assuring the content given is developmentally appropriate.” This was designated by the researcher based on the previously created code definitions. Within this subtheme, participants discussed values and problem solving at length.

Values need to be instilled by educators, through modelling and instruction, regardless of curriculum. One participant felt these core values are an opportunity to instruct for social justice and should be taught as its own topic, rather than trying to insert these ideals into the academic curriculum while others felt the flexibility in curriculum allows for teachers to explore social justice topics at an appropriate age level. However, regarding the ability to instruct or advocate for social justice at current location, two participants felt time was a restriction as the curriculum and schedule were so tight, there was barely time to fit anything else in, while the other six participants felt there was not only time but opportunity within the curriculum. The feelings of the two participants could be based on not knowing the curriculum well enough to teach as fluidly as those who have been implementing current curriculum for many years and, as such, having to spend more time learning the curriculum prior to instruction.

Participant Three, while agreeing that it can be difficult to incorporate social justice into the curriculum, became excited when recalling a recent classroom focus. She noted that,
It is hard with that. But then also we have the opportunity like we’ve started the project-based learning and stuff. . . . Like last year we looked into Saudi Arabia and obviously we censored a lot of the content. But it was more the kids learned like females can’t go to school, they can’t drive cars, they can’t walk in the streets by themselves. And the kids were just shocked that this is how it was interesting looking at cultures that are really diverse from their own, because in that kind of learning about how other people live and also what they should be grateful for, a little bit as well. As I said, yeah, it’s really cool when you do have time to actually look into stuff properly and the kids really love it. They were super excited. We spent 2 days on Saudi Arabia. That’s how excited they were. Wow. Yeah, they just so fascinated. Like the burkas is everything. Just the clothing, just how they are so fascinated, you know?

The realization that project-based learning can offer a window for students to learn about other cultures and open opportunities for discussion enthused Participant Three.

When asked how she advocated with social justice with her students, Participant Two shared she felt that social studies class was a good subject to use and mentioned Black History Month. She mentioned,

And Martin Luther King and then Thanksgiving, we had a big focus on the Indians and like what they went through. And then we’re starting to plan for International Day and we’re starting to talk about like the Aboriginal culture and things like that. So just constantly, whenever it comes up or whenever a social justice issue comes up, really tackling it and understanding it.

When discussing social justice in education, Participant Three remarked,
I think that education is the biggest thing to change anything in the world. Like now, a lot of students are very progressive with the global warming and doing little protest and love because they’ve been educated, and it’s been coming through so, they know that something’s wrong. Like a while ago, it wasn’t even a topic of discussion. So why would they even talk about it? So, I think education’s definitely at the forefront for any political or social change.

She went on to say education allows students to expand perspectives and break stereotypes, and it should be founded in social justice.

Participant Four recalled a stereotypical comment made in her class by a student and how she was able to use it as a learning opportunity.

When we were teaching about recycling, reuse, recycle and making sure you put things properly into proper bins and don’t just throw things on the ground. And, you know, and one of my kids in my mommy told me that the Chinese throw all their trash out the window and you’re not supposed to do that. They litter. And I was like, you know what? I’m from America and people that are in America, too. I said people litter all over the world. But what we can do is we can kind of help them learn, hey, you know what? We don’t put trash. We don’t throw trash out the window. We put trash in a trash can.

She related the stereotype to herself, and stated,

And I said, it all starts with us. It all starts with one person that’s putting the trash in the trash can. Maybe, you know, your baby sister, somebody is always watching, you know. So sometimes you just hear these, these cultural things that their parents may say in the privacy of their own homes. But at the same time, a five or six-year-old is a sponge. So, they’re taking things and they believe it passionately. So, I mean, of course, you don’t
want to be like your mommy and daddy is wrong. But you have to tell them in a friendly, kind manner. You know, not only do the Chinese, there’s people in Russia who you know, there’s people here, there’s people there. You know, it’s not a good thing, but we have to take care of our planet.

This participant understood many student stereotypes come from the home, and sensitivity is needed to correct the belief without causing offense.

As longer exposure and opportunity to instruct builds connections and increases understanding; participants felt there was a great need to utilize the time they have with their students, to use on the spot explanations and questions to discuss social justice issues in a purposeful, educated manner. Maintaining an open classroom and using the diversity within the classroom to lead discussions as well as to model inclusivity was one of the strategies mentioned by a participant, who does this actively in her classroom. The ability to discuss positive and negative actions, to give tools for self-reflection, which is an important element of understanding. It was felt that educators cannot push history aside; they need to talk about what happened and why it was wrong, even with students of a young age. Nonetheless, Participant Seven felt that there was not much advocacy for social justice happening in the school. However, this may be due to the participant not seeing it, or not viewing what she sees as an interpretation of advocacy.

The participants were quick to state that the information given needs to be developmentally appropriate, as not to scare students or discuss topics beyond their understanding. Participant Three was quick to note,

I’m not super sure they understand, like it is so important for you to think this way and not be close minded like the people before us maybe have been because people before us
were so close minded. And then this happened to people that didn’t deserve that to happen to them. And so, I mean, I don’t think they understand the extent of it, but I think they’re really getting a grasp of it at a first-grade level in which they can, without you know, scarring them for life. This participant made a strong point for ensuring truth at an appropriate level. Educators need to create a safe space for all where there is opportunity to learn about the people around them, to be culturally sensitive, respectful, and balanced so everyone can grasp concepts.

Participant Eight felt that social justice was a multi-layered concept, and Participant Four agreed there is a need to ensure students feel important, cared for, and invested in or they will lose interest and the impact can have long-term effects. While educators need to provide opportunities for social justice awareness as a skill that will be used in the future, Participant Three felt there needed to be a balance; they cannot only focus on academics in school. Social justice allows for children to have their needs met appropriately and is important in any scope, especially education. As noted by a participant in focus group one, “that’s something [social justice] that you have to fight for, and you have to work towards and in a culture and a community.”

Participant Four also noted that it was difficult to ensure students are getting the appropriate instruction of social justice with so many teachers from different parts of the world each focusing on what they feel is more important. This is also a valid point, while ideally educators would have a shared vision in education, this is not the case as education, experience, and personal history all impact a person’s perspective (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010). If a school is looking for a unified response to social justice in education, it would need to provide a specific training for all staff.
Participant One also recognized that parents want their children to be taught equally and fair, there is a need for a free and good education. It was felt by three of the participants that this international school had greater impact than schools in the U.S., by having social justice embedded in school values and offering a good opportunity to incorporate into instruction, it is at the core of the school. When asked if the current location offered opportunity for participants to pursue the instruction of social justice, Participant Two shared, “I really feel like I do. And I think it’s exciting because this is like the first really international place I’ve been. So, it really, I feel like it really impacts all of these kids to a greater extent than any other school I’ve been at in the States.” At the same time, another participant felt there was not enough education for staff or students on the major cultures represented at the school. While a valid point as there is no current cultural training for teachers, the participant is new to the school and this could be a feeling stemming from arrival to an international setting for the first time.

Four of the participants felt that educators need to advocate for students to understand their actions and emotions and to guide them, rather than tell them. Participant Four also felt that students accept and believe passionately when they place value on something, that they are very receptive. Educators also need to take initiative to get to know and understand their students. Participant Three felt it was hard to accommodate parents’ values and cultural perspectives in the classroom. In an international setting, due to the multicultural aspect, there are a variety of values and beliefs that can conflict with another (Allen, 2018). While it is important to maintain positive relationships with mutual respect, there are times that the school’s values and culture must be maintained over parent preference.

Another commonality was that students needed to be treated equally and held accountable for their actions, especially in terms of administrators applying consequences for
poor behavior or failure to follow school rules and expectations. Students need to be guided to critical self-reflection, to help them truly understand and be taught skills of accountability. Practicing social justice in a student’s own life is key to help fight social injustice, and not just something do something based on the teacher’s instruction.

Theme 2: Perspective

The overarching theme perspective was created from pairing the two subthemes personal characteristics and diversity. These two subthemes created the second largest theme and had 144 codes total. Within personal characteristics, there were five separate codes with a combined total of 70 coded pieces throughout the data, and diversity had three codes with a combined total of 74 coded pieces throughout the data. This theme was well-balanced between the two subthemes.

Subtheme: Personal characteristics. The definition created by the researcher based on the code definitions within this subtheme was, “Feelings or emotion responses, relating to character or personality traits of an individual.” In this theme, participants felt social emotional learning was key, and being able to understand how one feels, or label emotion, as well as developing effective communication skills, is appropriate. The values-based lesson plans for Grade 2 provided key vocabulary and strategies to help students how to manage and understand emotions, as well as provided teachers questions they could ask to support students understanding (Cahill et al., 2018b).

Participant Six felt that compassion is the “epitome of social justice;” students need to feel cared for, respected, heard, and safe. Also, character traits need to be further developed, and personal development can be attained through education. Another participant took a different stance, she preferred to shy away from unjust situations so she would not have to discuss it. This
could be due to her inability to discuss with a younger age group, or due to not having full awareness of what social justice means.

Teaching appropriate coping strategies, such as how to be calm, trying new things, or promoting independence, was also discussed at length by the participants of focus group one. The feeling that students needed to understand the connection between actions and emotions to be self-aware and mindful of others was important. By these educators incorporating their world view into their teaching, it can also provide a different perspective, which can enhance the learning, although it may create an imbalance if a teacher’s world view was narrow or prejudiced, which Participant Four in focus group two referenced using an example of a teacher she used to work with. She said the teacher, “wouldn’t teach the freedom of speech part because . . . you cannot be telling these kids they can go around and have freedom of speech.” Participant Seven made a comment regarding the maturity of the adults, how some themselves have poor communication skills.

**Subtheme: Diversity.** This is defined as, “Who someone identifies as, based on personal life experiences and cultural influences, including age, race, or social status,” as created by the researcher based on the code definitions. All participants felt quite strongly about this topic, although it was not discussed greatly throughout the data. As the participants themselves were a diverse group, it was beneficial to get a variety of perspectives.

All participants agreed everyone is different, from country, culture, ethnicity, race, or background. Participant Five posited, having one’s own opinion or voice establishes individuality, as children are ego-centric, they need opportunity to understand themselves before learning to understand others. Referring to how people want to be treated, one of the Grade 2 values-based lesson plans included the statement, “It is important to respect people’s differences
and to understand and be able to tell other people what is good for us” (Cahill et al., 2018b, p. 22).

Participant Two shared a recent story from her classroom. As it was around Christmas, the class was discussing different holidays and how people celebrate based on culture. One little girl spoke up and informed the class she prays to the sun. The other students in the class thought it was a ridiculous idea and began laughing. This participant used the opportunity to have the students consider their actions and ask themselves if they were being compassionate and inclusive of those in the classroom. The following day, the little girl had opportunity to share more details and the students became very excited and interested in what she was saying and learned more about a different culture. The participant felt this was talking about social justice to a small degree.

There was a mutual sentiment from participants that tension between people stems from personality differences as well as cultural deprivation. This makes the development of skills such as open-mindedness, flexibility, or global mindedness in education essential as these skills may not be taught in the home. Due to this lack of cultural awareness, it is important to be able to approach topics with mindfulness, respect, and care.

There was total agreement amongst participants that differences are encouraged, and different cultures’ values can provide for diverse capabilities and expectations. They also agreed that people do gravitate towards those of the same or similar background. Stereotypes are formed when little is known of another person’s culture, or when there is an accepted generalization of a culture or people group based on limited interactions. Understanding culture moves a person forward into understanding actions and opening perspectives.

During the second focus group meeting, Participant Seven stated,
I think that because we have such a diverse student body, and educators, in itself is promoting some idea of not really social justice, but I think exposing kids to different cultures and ideas is a good way to facilitate social justice, if that makes sense.

It was felt that education is a tool that can break stereotypes; therefore, educators need to encourage students to look beyond what they have been told and allow them to come to their own conclusions. Self-reflection is a strategy that can be used with students to understand their actions or feelings and where they stem from, which is an important part of understanding the world around them.

**Theme 3: Equality**

The overarching theme Equality was created from pairing the two subthemes fairness and inequality. These two subthemes created the smallest theme and had 67 codes total. Within fairness, there were four separate codes with a combined total of 60 coded pieces throughout the data, and inequality only contained one code with a combined total of seven coded pieces throughout the data.

**Subtheme: Fairness.** The definition for fairness as created by the researcher based on the code definitions for this study is, “Acceptance and/or tolerance of another person, through equal and fair treatment to ensure equal access to resources necessary to be successful and productive members of society.” This topic was also a key focus of discussion amongst all participants; it was also noted as a concept, in its most basic ideal, that young students could understand. The noted common complaints from students in the age range of five to eight years old is “fair or not fair;” which participants used as an indicator that their students understood fairness at its most fundamental level.
During discussion, there was a consensus that students should receive an effective education, that is best for them; no one gets special treatment or privilege, and Participant Five noted quite strongly, this included ensuring children with special needs are included in receiving the best education for their needs. Equality included being fair, friendly, and compassionate. Students needed to be taught to look at things in a neutral way with an understanding and acceptance of others and making students aware of others first. Participant Three stated,

Social justice would be like finding equity or equality within the classroom, treating everybody the same regardless of their background or abilities or anything like that. As in not the same, but like equity as in treating them how they should be like with learning differences and that kind of stuff.

When discussing the question regarding improving understanding of students’ awareness of social justice, five of the participants felt that while students at this stage do not understand the politics of social justice, using specific topics that directly relate to social justice or oppression can introduce these issues at their level. It also allowed an understanding that while a balance is sought, there are unfair situations that take place that are not socially just. Participant Two noted, “And so, it’s kind of like introducing them to these social justice issues. So, whenever they come across them in the world, that is their oyster. They know how to, like, embrace it and understand it.” All participants felt that exposure and/or learning about other cultures led to understanding and acceptance of others, as did understanding cultures and not expecting others to follow or agree with your cultural ideals, by being culturally inclusive and tolerant.

Participant Three shared a story about a student in her grade level. There was a boy who wears a turban which, in this school setting and country, was not a common sight. She explained many students wanted to touch it, but not with ill intent or disrespect, simply out of curiosity;
they wanted to know what was under the turban. When they found out there was only hair under the turban, they were no longer interested, and the touching stopped. By providing answers to the students’ questions, the teacher was able to communicate for understanding and acceptance.

When discussing how she felt her students understood social justice, Participant Three felt that students do not see racism due to age; that they don’t leave each other out due to where they are from, but due to personality or lack of common interests. This could be due to lack of experience with students who have low tolerance for others, or she does not see certain aspects of student behavior through the social justice lens. It is a common misnomer that young children do not have to capacity for understanding social justice and should not be held accountable until an older age (Hawkins, 2013).

Subtheme: Inequality. This final subtheme was a surprising result in the data. It was an unexpected finding as it was not a theme considered prior to research, but the researcher felt it so important and necessary that it was given a code designation entitled, “double standard.” For this study, based on the code definitions, the researcher defined it as, “Being inequal in the treatment of others” and in a study looking into instruction and advocacy of social justice, this subtheme certainly deserved close attention.

When asked about the experiences or perspectives that led her to her definition of social justice in education, participants four and six strongly felt students at international schools were treated differently due to social economic status, impact on school enrollment, or parent involvement. The specific example given by Participant Four was if there were a family group of three or four children compared to a family with one child, the one child could face higher consequences such as expulsion as, if they were to leave the school, it would only be one student leaving. However, if a child in a larger family left the school due to expulsion, all siblings would
potentially also go, creating a deficit in tuition for the school. This inequal standard would allow for students in sibling groups to have more opportunities to remain at the school when compared to a student who did not have siblings. The power dynamic is unequal and until it changes, social justice will not be practiced to its fullest. When discussing in a focus group, others agreed with this and felt there were no true consequences if the outcome of the student consequence would affect the school in a negative way.

Summary

In this chapter, an analysis of the data collected on how teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in international Kindergarten–Grade 2 classrooms was presented through three data collection methods of this research study. These methods were focus groups with seven participants, semistructured interviews with eight participants (seven were same participants of the focus group), and physical artifacts using values-based lesson plans used in Kindergarten–Grade 2 classrooms. By using an intrinsic case study, the researcher attempted gain a better understanding by providing the thoughts and feelings of the participants as compiled from each data collection method.

These data were analyzed using the framework method and presented as three overarching themes, communication, equality, and perspective. There were also six subthemes that resulted from the inductive coding of the transcripts and documents: instruction, interaction, fairness, inequality, diversity, and personal characteristics. As Chapter 4 explored the research question from the perspective of the participants through data collection methods, Chapter 5 will attempt to draw conclusions and further considerations from the research findings.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This case study explored how teachers instructed and advocated for social justice in international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms by describing how teachers defined social justice, teacher perspective, shared anecdotes, and strategies used in these classrooms. The analysis of these data were conducted using the framework method and allowed for a thorough examination and clear interpretation of the data. Evaluation of the results of the study are found within this chapter.

The first section on this chapter presents a summary of the research results which were presented in Chapter 4 with a thorough analysis and arrangement of the data organized by the themes and subthemes found in the data. A discussion of the results follows this summary. Although Chapter 4 provided a detailed analysis of the results, this chapter discussed and evaluated how the participants provide instruction and advocacy of social justice. Doucet and Adair (2013) posited, “a teacher can accurately and meaningfully teach about race and other somewhat complicated identity markers if she presents the material in an engaging way that connects with children’s experiences” (p. 88). Moving forward in this chapter, there is a discussion of the results in relation to the literature, then a discussion on limitations. Recommendations for further research are discussed as the chapter concludes.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address one main question, how teachers instructed and advocated for social justice in international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms. In this study, an intrinsic case study design was used, and data were gathered through focus groups, semistructured interviews, and physical artifacts. The researcher wanted to understand how teachers instructed and advocated for social justice in their classrooms. Within this study,
much data were gathered and analyzed providing insight and understanding into how teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in their classrooms.

The two focus groups and the eight semistructured interviews allowed the teachers’ own words to be captured. During the focus group, a healthy dialogue was maintained, and participants showed respect for the others in the group. The physical artifacts by way of 18 values-based lesson plans provided the researcher information on what social-emotional focused learning was being implemented in the classrooms. Each of these data collection types gave the researcher information to be analyzed and interpreted.

The framework method allowed the researcher to follow seven methodical steps from collection to interpretation (Gale et al., 2013). It was during the initial coding that the researcher began to see commonalities within the data. As the data were reviewed, new codes were formed, and some codes were revised as there was further understanding. Once the coding was completed and the framework created, a chart was formed to assemble the coded data into a single document. This charting process was lengthy but allowed the researcher to again review the data and ensure the pieces were in the correct code. The chart of codes allowed the researcher to evaluate all sentences or phrases under a certain code’s data in one place and truly look at what was being said. Once interpretation was completed, the themes and subthemes were evident and supported from the data.

There were three main themes and six subthemes discovered during data analysis of 25 codes. The main themes were communication, equality, and perspective. Each of these themes had two subthemes; for communication, instruction, and interaction; for equality, fairness, and inequality; for perspective, diversity, and personal characteristics. The findings of this study suggest teachers are instructing and advocating social justice within their classrooms to varying
degrees, although they do not all fully realize what they are doing would be considered social justice.

**Discussion of the Results**

The main purpose of this study was to understand how teachers in international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms instructed or advocated for social justice. Participants shared their thoughts and ideas through focus groups and semistructured interviews, and values-based lesson plans were utilized as physical artifacts to be analyzed. During this process, data were analyzed and interpreted. There were three key findings once the process was complete.

**Finding one: Verbal and nonverbal communication is essential to understanding and recognizing social justice.** From data collection and analysis, it was found that not all participants had a solid grasp on what social justice was. Participant Seven, while not entirely sure, focused her definition around social emotional learning and Participant Five stated she hardly understood social justice herself. This was unexpected as social justice is a constant topic in mainstream media, especially in western media. Hytten and Bettez (2011) stated, “Yet the more we see people invoking the idea of social justice, the less clear it becomes what people mean, and if it is meaningful at all” (p. 8), of which social media may play a role. Therefore, it was interesting, and beneficial, for participants to participate in the focus groups to hear what others had to say and be able to gain further understanding from peers. The conversations during the focus groups were active and stayed on topic, the researcher did need to encourage some of the participants in the second focus group to add to the conversation as they were allowing the others to speak. This facilitation added value to the meetings as it allowed all participants to share their voice and the remarks amongst participants showed they were seriously and thoughtfully engaging in an honest, valuable discussion.
Under the first finding, the data showed that when communicating with students, intentional focus on the term “social justice” was not necessary as teachers could focus on the qualities and aspects of social justice such as equality, diversity, and acceptance. Prior to the discussions on social justice, it was believed that the teachers would not realize if they were instructing or advocating for social justice within the classroom. While participants did not specifically state using the term “social justice” in their classrooms, they all engaged in practices that encouraged equality, celebrated diversity, and supported inclusive practices for all students. Picower (2012) noted, “In order to provide culturally relevant, social justice education within this context, it is critical to develop strategies for integrating the elements into the curriculum that teachers are required to teach” (p. 13). These practices, along with the implementation of the values-based lesson plans, showed teachers do instruct and advocate for social justice without realizing it.

The analysis and interpretation of the data also showed that each participant valued the ideals of social justice, but did not consider using the term within in their classroom as it was not a part of the mandated academic curriculum or a part of the values-based lesson plans. Participant Three used this definition, Social justice would be like finding equity or equality within the classroom, treating everybody the same regardless of their background or abilities or anything like that. As in not the same, but like equity as in treating them how they should be like with learning differences and that kind of stuff. Yeah, I would say that’s how it should be conducted in the classroom.
However, when social justice issues appeared in the classroom or curriculum, seven of eight participants were comfortable and confident to discuss the issues at an age appropriate level. Participant Two stated,

    Yeah, I would say a lot because I think a lot of the social justice issues do come with multiculturalism and being inclusive in the classroom and being inclusive in your learning and everything that you’re teaching. Not having like one side, but kind of being open about everything.

By allowing organic conversations to develop and grow, the participant created opportunities for growth, understanding, and acceptance.

    While the participants did discuss student age and how they understand the concepts of social justice, Participant Eight stated her students only know basics of right and wrong while Participant Three felt students still were not aware because they are in Grade 2. However, Participant Two felt it was important to push forward with the conversation in an appropriate manner. She stated,

    I’m not super sure they understand, like it is so important for you to think this way and not be close minded like the people before us maybe have been because people before us were so close minded. And then this happened to people that didn’t deserve that to happen to them. And so, I mean, I don’t think they understand the extent of it, but I think they’re really getting a grasp of it at a first-grade level in which they can, without you know, scarring them for life.

The participants overall felt their students were not at an age for understanding the full extent of social justice concepts but agreed that while they may not understand yet, they as teachers would not avoid the topic or suppress a discussion in their classroom.
The data from the study also suggested that these discussions on social justice was an encouragement and motivation for participants to apply a more focused approach to social justice within the classroom as well as to educate themselves in areas they may not have understanding, such as culture or diversity. These findings implied the participants felt social justice was not only an important topic for discussion and action, but that it should not be restricted from those of a young age. As the feedback was relatively all positive, it is a good indicator that participants will continue to instruct and advocate for social justice, now with a greater invested interest.

Although there may have been some initial questions or clarifications, all participants agreed with the established definition of social justice in education as proposed by the researcher, “means guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (Cochran-Smith 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 8). Participant Three, initially confused by the term “unequal relationships” received clarification and when asked what part stood out, remarked, “The unequal relationships. When you explained it, it made sense. Just reading it in that context, I wasn’t sure what that meant. But it makes sense when you talk about like prejudice and discrimination. The inequality makes sense.” Participant Five felt the critical self-reflection was important, and the participants in her focus group agreed. In the other focus group, these same two sections also stood out overall. Participant Seven stated, “I will I’ll just stick to the unequal relationships and the matrix of it. So dynamic, to have like crisscross everything coming together with education” and, regarding self-reflection, Participant Six observed, “the part of education of getting students to be conscious of their choices and their actions and everything around them, rather than just
telling them how to get them to that next level.” The term, “mechanisms of oppression” stood out to Participant Eight, who stated,

I think especially in the field of education, it’s really important to think about those things in how you teach in your style of teaching and what you focus on in your teaching. And I think it just kind of depends on the teacher. But and I don’t know how to put this, their world view, how it is incorporated into their teaching style.

She also shared,

And not a lot of people think about stuff like this when it comes to education. So, I think it’s good that when you think about social justice, you think about mechanisms of oppression, but it’s something that should be considered in the educational field.

This feedback from participants throughout the study also informed the researcher that purposeful discussions with teachers on relevant topics provided personal and professional development opportunities and they were glad they had participated as it allowed them to process the questions and comments made during the meetings.

**Finding two: An awareness of culture is important in preparing to understand and successfully manage a multicultural classroom.** All the participants also provided evidence that they had a general, but limited, understanding of how to work in a multicultural environment and create a system to allow for cultural differences to be supported while retaining strong classroom management. This was without necessarily using the label of social justice advocacy although a few participants realized they need further experience. Participant Two stated while she has worked internationally, the cultures in her previous location were very similar, as was her experiences in America; she taught in a monocultural environment. Sharing her sentiment, Participant Five noted she herself grew up in a small American town and was not exposed to
other cultures. She noticed her current students had more cultural awareness than she did. She stated, “They’re growing up in a classroom with kids from so many different cultures, so many different parts of the world.” She realized she needs to take the initiative to learn more about cultures, especially the cultures within the school and her classroom. She continued,

And then maybe that’s something I need to do myself. But, as far as a support, I know that I could ask for it. And then I would be given to me like I could ask you for help. Because you know a lot about different cultures.

These two examples show a teacher’s lack of cultural exposure can stunt their ability to understand culture and identify key cultural differences. Having this understanding and willingness to look beyond current understanding will allow these participants to expand their perspectives.

**Finding three: Organizational culture plays a key role in advocacy of social justice.**

While the researcher held the opinion that some participants would not see the value in instructing or advocating for social justice, this was proven unfounded, as participants felt social justice concepts and promotion was already a part of the school culture. Participant Two felt, “it’s really embedded in the school values in how we operate,” and Participant Six stated, “I think at the school, because of the core values which we do reinforce, we have a good opportunity to incorporate those into instruction.” Throughout the data, it was shown that participants placed value on social justice instruction and advocacy in their classrooms and in the school. Participant Five enthusiastically described how she felt when asked how she would define social justice,

So, say I’m going to reference special education because that’s what my background is in. So, making sure that all kids have the appropriate differentiation, the correct IEP
[individualized education plan], all of their needs are being met that way so they can be in the least restrictive environment. But even going into social justice more is like socioeconomic status, race, culture, these things and making sure that those specific things that make kids unique are not one, like there’s no bias towards them, but also that there’s their needs are getting met as well. If they have needs.

It is clear throughout the data that the participants do consider various aspects of social justice, based on their experience and expectations.

Another aspect of organizational culture, teacher workload was also an expected barrier to teachers being willing to instruct and advocate for social justice, as the workload is heavy, and there are many additional school events and activities that, while required, can cut into instructional time. Although Participant Seven felt,

I don’t really feel like I have the opportunity because our time is so strictly controlled that there’s barely enough time to do anything else than what we’re already doing. But I do think that I mean, it’s unfortunately it can’t be brought into the program, it can’t, which we simply don’t have time. So, I don’t feel like academically that would be something that would be possible.

Participant Three also felt the current location was curriculum heavy; aside from these two comments, overall participants felt general classroom interactions, values-based lesson plans, and social studies class were places social justice concepts could be incorporated without adding stress to the teachers’ workload. During the first focus group, a participant noted,

I do think the school is flexible in how we plan things. I guess we have to follow the curriculum. But social studies is a little more flexible so that it’s just the classroom
teachers have a lot of opportunities to talk about more social justice if they have time or can.

This is supported by American educator and social justice advocate Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath, who stated, “I see history/social studies instruction as a necessary content area for preparing our students to be critical thinkers and active and informed citizens of our democratic society” (Reinhard, 2014, p. 9). If teachers can see the curriculum as an opportunity to instill values and expand perspectives, students will have greater opportunities for learning.

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

This research study focused on how teachers in international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms instructed and advocated for social justice. This section seeks to connect the results to the literature reviewed. The researcher used the literature review to discuss age (Park, 2011; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004), family and cultural influences (Allen & Kelly, 2015) and peer relationships (Bornstein, 2012), as well as the conceptual framework, which included discussion on the validity of a child’s education to educate society and that, based on misconceptions and history of social injustice.

There were major theories found in the literature, namely critical race theory, social justice theory, and sociocultural theory. By focusing the literature on social justice and the young children, the theories lent credibility to the topic, and the correlations, or lack of, will be discussed in relation to the results. The researcher noted three key findings that evolved from the data and provided a basis of understanding to answer the research question. The correlation of results to research will be organized from these three key findings.

**Finding one: Verbal and nonverbal communication is essential to understanding and recognizing social justice.** Park (2011) noted, “The language we use to talk about racial and
ethnic differences is an important tool young children use in learning to understand these differences” (p. 394). Communication is an important key in relationships, and language is just one-way people can share and interact.

Teachers need to not only model appropriate words and actions, but to provide opportunity for students to learn and master these skills. The study of relevant literature developed in Chapter 2 revealed a belief that children cannot use the appropriate social tools that adults can (Park, 2011), which also aligns with Piaget’s model of cognitive development stating that young children cannot understand the complexities and mechanisms of social justice (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). These ideas were disproved in the data analyzed in this study. “Educators can infuse the curriculum with opportunities to develop and strengthen the skills students need to become engaged as real-world problem seekers and solvers” (Bruce-Davis et al., 2017, p. 250). Through the participants own choices to model social justice in word and action, to the values-based lesson plans implemented, participants felt students understood at a basic level and the skills they were teaching were not only important but necessary.

Participant Six noted, “Just like on a social level in the classroom and really upholding them and modeling them and inserting those into the lessons if possible,” when discussing how she felt she instructed or advocated for social justice in her classroom. This is an accurate observation, as, “Studies of early cognitive development have led researchers to understand the developing mind as astonishingly competent, active, and insightful from a very early age” (Allen & Kelly, 2015, p. 88). Also, during a focus group meeting, one of the participants stated, “I think especially in the field of education, it’s really important to think about those things in how you teach in your style of teaching and what you focus on in your teaching.” Participant Five felt it important to start small, use the little things when starting to establish an understanding, not to
jump into big or complex ideas right away. Bruce-Davis (2017) mirrored this sentiment, “Using knowledge of students’ entry points, educators can teach and model the various kinds of problem-seeking and -solving skills that specific learners may need to develop” (p. 256). As problem solving was a main component in the Grade One values-based lesson plans, it would be a topic students and teachers could use to learn and hone skills.

Communication of social justice topics at an age appropriate level was key to ensure students achieved understanding. Participants were all in agreement that the topic of social justice was not above their students learning when discussing history or current events. Participant Two stated,

I think they’re starting to understand. I don’t think they understand that it is such a huge deal because they don’t recognize like the really big like hurt and harm that the world has gone through already and social justice issues, just because we kinda like don’t mention like the really horrible things that happen.

Doucet and Adair (2013) affirmed this and stated that, “Being honest is not necessarily about presenting an array of facts that can overwhelm or frighten a child. But it does not mean being outright dishonest about difficult issues” (p. 94). By keeping the content age appropriate, teachers can share without scaring students or causing them to focus on the negative.

Socialization theorists posited unspoken communication also impacted student learning and an educator’s response to a student can impact an observer as well (Kayama et al., 2016). While discussing how a teacher can assess if their students understand social justice, Participant Six remarked, “I think monitoring their behavior like their social behavior outside of classroom. Well, they’re just acting freely to see if they’ve actually taken away from expectations and what
you can teach them.” This statement showed this participant recognized actions and reactions are a part of understanding.

For further successful communication, students’ emotions need to be identified and labeled so they can understand what they feel and why, as well as how to cope with their emotions. Perspective can be a difficult concept to understand as everyone has their own frame of reference, which is “the set of assumptions or criteria by which a person or group judges ideas, actions, and experiences” (Frame of Reference, 2020). While no two people respond the same in every situation even if they have the same background or upbringing, educators need to understand how to expand their own perspectives as well as that of their students.

In the literature, Hawkins (2012) contradicted prior theorists Piaget and Kohlberg by recognizing a young student’s ability for compassion, empathy, and a moral understanding of right and wrong. As participants discussed how they thought their students understood the concepts of social justice, diversity, and equality, a main response was that they would be able to observe students’ actions, if they were being fair or recognizing fairness. Participant One felt the students at international schools in general were mature compared to students in the U.S. as they had more exposure to culture, race, and backgrounds. There was also a sentiment that students of this age are just starting to understand social justice, and it is hard to gauge as there is a divide between those who are self-aware and those who are not. Participant Five noted that students understood positive and negative recognition, and this was used to reinforce compassion. Finally, Participant Three noted a term like diversity was difficult, as even though it was a vocabulary word in the curriculum, students did not connect it to their own lives; Participant Six noted students were aware but at an initial stage, understanding at a basic level.
Transformative resistance theory was initially used to focus on types of resistance from students on college campuses, it is now used to “examine the beliefs and actions of individual teachers” (Henning, 2013, p. 123), and can focus on society, politics, or teaching. In the context of social justice, it illuminates a person’s own struggles and how they choose to act upon it; in essence, how someone resists personal or shared oppression. Participant Eight, while not expressing her own struggles, realized that the struggles of the past can be something that can be acted upon today, through education and awareness. She noted,

When it comes to like teaching historical things, I think it’s really important to break like inter-generational ideas of like what people say happened in the past versus what actually happened. Like Thanksgiving, for instance. I find that like is a great opportunity to shut down, I don’t know, what I believe is like a system of oppression for Native Americans. And I think it’s really important for kids at this age to learn about stuff like that.

Although the idea of learning from the past is not new, it is an important reminder to educators that they can be the transformative piece in a student’s life.

Regarding primary students, Allen and Kelly (2015) noted, “Children understand their own feelings more . . . and learn better ways to describe experiences and express thoughts and feelings” (p. 106), which is an important part of understanding the world around them. Managing emotion is a necessary skill at the lower primary age and participants felt the values-based lesson plans provided opportunity and strategies they could use in the classroom. Participant Six noted, “I think from the classes that we’ve been teaching from, they’ve been really successful, I think, getting students to interact with each other and reflect on their behavior and everything.” During the first focus group meeting it was felt that self was a starting point, “Like start with like identify because they’re very egocentric. So, start with identifying your own emotions, your own
culture, then move to identifying how your emotions maybe affect another kid.” By providing emotional support, teachers can guide a student as they begin to understand and identify what they are feeling and how to appropriately express those feelings.

**Finding two: Awareness of culture is important in preparing to understand and manage a multicultural classroom.** In the literature, critical race theory dominated the idea of equality between all, and focused mainly on racial inequality between Whites versus People of Color (Yosso, 2015) while Mulé et al. (2009) felt the struggle for social justice encompassed more than race, but socioeconomic status, gender identity and orientation, as well as students suffering injustice online or those with medical conditions. The inequality is not specifically between Whites and People of Color, rather it is an ethnocentric mindset that causes divide, which includes not only country of origin, but home language. As there are many biracial students at the school whose first language is that of the local population, and there are many local students who hold foreign passports, often, while the groups may not look alike, their common language is the connecting link. Participants noted that their students often stay with others from their same country, and the worry of not having someone from the same country causing stress on some students. Participant Six recalled,

"I do notice, though, I give my students a lot of the kids tend to be a little bit cliquey with who they hang out with, as in a lot of Japanese students who cling together, a lot of the Korean students who cling together. I got this idea of one of the boys was crying constantly because he didn’t have another Japanese boy in his class."

She went on to say the boy was upset for a long time but eventually adjusted to the classroom and was successful in making friends with others. Participant Two noted,
I think I have a lot to do with the parent cliques, though. I think they all hang out at home and so they are a part of that, of their WeChat groups, because they have sleepovers and stuff. And I’m like, who all went? And it’s like all the Japanese kids.

She was aware that the shared country or language mentality could stem from the home, which correlated with both social justice theory (Ayala et al., 2011) and sociocultural theory (Cherry, 2018) which find weight in the importance of social interactions. Other participants noted that language was key component, as when students are enrolled, the English language capability could range from native language speaker to no English acquisition at all.

Family plays a major role in a child’s understanding of social justice. Family upbringing, societal relationships, and own culture were also noted in the literature as having an important role in the understanding of social justice concepts (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Bornstein, 2012; Bruce-Davis et al., 2017). Participants noted parents can have both positive and negative effects on a student’s understanding of cultures as well on their acceptance and tolerance of others. Participant Seven noted it was “hard to navigate sometimes because I think that, you know, they learn from their parents. One way to do things and say things and then they learn, here [at school] that maybe you shouldn’t be saying or doing those things.” It was also a concern when discussing social justice topics at school, as Participant Two felt it important to be culturally sensitive as when the students went home and told parents what they learned or talked about, the parents may not want their child to be involved in those discussions.

Participant Three felt that when children in her class did say something discriminatory or prejudiced, it was because they had heard it from another source, like parents, and that they did not truly understand what they were saying. Participant Four echoed this sentiment when she noted, “Sometimes you just hear these, these cultural things that their parents may say in the
privacy of their own homes.” While parents may not realize how much their children are hearing or listening to, participants agreed students say many things at school that have they heard at home. Participant Four recalled an incident in her class when she was teaching on recycling and a student announced to the class, “My mommy told me that the Chinese throw all their trash out the window and you’re not supposed to do that. They litter.” The participant did not scold the child or tell her she was wrong, she instead used the statement as an opportunity to educate and explain the importance of our actions. Doucet and Adair (2013) noted, “It is important for young children to know that they can ask questions freely and will be taken seriously and not be embarrassed in the process” (p. 92). When educators engage in appropriate conversations with students, and do not shy away from difficult or awkward topics, students will have an opportunity to expand their understanding and perspective.

In the second focus group meeting, when discussing if they agreed with the meaning of social justice given to them by the researcher in the initial question: Social justice in education “means guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (Cochran-Smith 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 8), Participant Five agreed with the set definition and stated,

And then they have to analyze their oppression based off of hierarchies like where are you from? Is this passport, you know, does it hold more value than another passport? You know, is my country better than your country? Does, do my parents make more money than your parents? So, I think it pretty much hits pretty much everything of social justice. Pertaining to education.
This is validated by Picower’s (2012) statement, “By exposing students to people they can relate to within social movements, teachers provide not only a sense of hope but also tangible models of what it looks like to stand up on the side of justice” (p. 9). Participant Five was surprised in the first focus group by the use of the term “guide” in the definition, “I didn’t know that social justice meant the act of guiding. . . . I didn’t realize that it was the means of guiding students and how to teach them, but I would agree with it.” Participant Eight felt that guiding was a fitting term within education, “the key component like guiding the students is really important because as teachers, that’s what we’re meant to do, which is to guide not to tell them how they should be thinking or how they should be doing things.” Bruce-Davis et al. (2017) noted that,

It is the responsibility of educators to prepare students now by providing the flexibility necessary to develop their abilities within the classroom setting, so that they may be successful in both their personal lives and in careers that may not even be invented yet. (p. 250)

It is clear students need guidance and understanding on what social justice means and how they can approach people or situations with a positive, forward-thinking outlook.

Finding three: Organizational culture plays a key role in the advocacy of social justice. The results showed that language expectations needed to be upheld in all grade levels for students to have an established environment and to be able to work together. The language issue divided the participants in the second focus group as some felt they needed to uphold the school and parent expectation of only English on campus, whereas other teachers felt non-teaching times like lunch or recess would be an acceptable time to allow students to interact in their home languages. Allen and Kelly (2015) noted, “Understanding the power of language is important for people who interact with children” (p. 98). Participant Six used this reasoning with her students,
“I always point out, like if you’re speaking your language you know that not everyone can understand and talk with you.” While language is a tool of communication, it can be used as a barrier against acceptance of others, especially when there is a lack of understanding.

When asked what social justice in education mean to her, Participant Two stated, “The word I would say it’s just having equality across the board for everything, whether it be like where they’re from, their background, where they’ve been, what they look like. Anything like that just being equal.” It also connects with the idea that all children, regardless of race, ability, economic status, or gender identity, are entitled to fair and equal treatment (Mulé et al., 2009).

As another facet of organizational culture, participants felt that schools need to be held accountable for their actions regarding unfair treatment of students and families. The trigger that caused focus group two participants to discuss identify inequality at their current location was the researcher’s question, “In what ways does a school culture environment promote or not promote social justice?” When discussing this question, Participant Four felt “there may be a little bit of disconnect . . . in the area of consequences” and compared international school to American schools regarding understanding consequences and how they not only relate, but prepare people for, the real world. She stated,

You have people actually paying loads of money to attend to the school. Sometimes there’s this disconnect between if you don’t show up to school, it’s kind of like, uh it’s OK. And to me, that kind of relates to the real world. When we get older, we have responsibilities. We have to go to work. We have to do things. If I behave in a certain manner, then there is going to be a real consequence attached to my actions. And sometimes I think because of the nature of our school, the diversity of our school. The
fact that these children are paying so much to go to school, they don’t have certain
consequences attached that they would need to use in real life circumstances.

She felt that by attending an international school that was paid for, students could avoid the
consequences that students attending public schools faced such as truancy. Participant Six felt
the inequality came from students not having the same consequences based on parents who were
more demanding or fought harder for their children when compared to less active parents. While
G. Sapungan and R. Sapungan (2014) stated that parents are important stakeholders in the
school, and played key roles in their child’s education, Participant Six felt that some parents
would fight or threaten pulling their child(ren) from the school if certain expectations or
demands were not met; moving onto the next grade, for example. Participant Eight noted
Participant Six was talking about “a power dynamic or hierarchy” which Participant Six felt it to
be a challenge, and that it was a commonality for “any school where the students are paying
customers.” Mulé et al. (2009) echoed the sentiment of these deficiencies when urging schools
“to implement school-wide primary preventions that support all children” (p. 7). If teachers
speak up and schools listen, these issues can be addressed.

Limitations

The limitation within this study was time constraints. The time constraints were initially a
concern due to participant schedules and finding time to meet for focus groups, semistructured
interviews, and observations. For the initial plan of holding one focus group meeting, due to
participant health, it needed to be split into two groups to accommodate schedules and wellness,
and even then, only seven of the eight participants were able to participate over the two meeting
dates in December 2019. The interviews proved not to be a time constraint as the researcher was
able to meet with all participants within a 10-day window in January 2020, prior to school
holiday closure. Due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, schools were closed in early February 2020, which made observations unable to be completed. This timing issue caused a modification to be made to the data collection and physical artifacts were used instead, as they could be viewed and analyzed without needing to involve the participants or have close contact with anyone. The short time available did not allow for prolonged engagement, a strategy the researcher would have liked to include when considering the credibility of the study. While these data sources provided much evidence, the study would have been fuller if data collection was a part of a longitudinal study.

**Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The goal of this research study was to understand how teachers instructed or advocated for social justice in international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms. The theories this research study was built on include Critical Race Theory (Ortiz & Jani, 2010), Social justice theory (Ayala, Hage, & Lantz, 2011), transformative resistance theory (Henning, 2013), and Sociocultural Theory (Cherry, 2018). The results of the study did not prove or disprove any of these theories but supported their ideologies in data analysis and interpretation. While there was not a clear racial issue shown in the data, there were examples of a lack of understanding of students from other cultures. For example, Participant One noted,

So, I mean, I’ve had situations. Oh, well, they are, they don’t know Chinese, or they don’t know and they’re this. So, we’re just like always wait. Maybe they’re here to learn that. So, let’s not just be unfair about their culture just because maybe your parents teach you that.

Transformative resistance theory was proved multiple times by the teachers who stated they were active in advocation for social justice, as noted in Chapter 4. Both social cultural theory and
social justice theory were recognized as teachers shared their perspectives on working toward the common goal of creating an environment and opportunity to allow students to become a good person, an ideal which supports both theories.

There are several implications for the results in the instruction and advocacy of social justice as well as the preparation of the school and classroom environment to create a safe and appropriate space for students and staff. One of the factors that played a major role in the study was communication, namely how teachers expressed and explained social justice concepts during the school day, whether during a lesson or during a break. The participants of the study agreed advocacy of social justice is something they felt they provided naturally, regardless of the required curriculum.

There were four participants who felt they were personally struggling with the multicultural aspect of the international school community and did not feel they had the awareness of many different cultures or the ability to differentiate one cultural aspect from another. This implies a need for training or resources on school cultures be offered or required for teachers during onboarding at a new school. Also, as some participants did not share the same view on what social justice meant, the implication that schools also need to provide training on social justice at their location, what is means, what it looks like, and how it is assessed.

The implications for policy lies with school administration. As schools require different types of training, such as academics or child safety, which are beneficial to both the school and staff (Riley & Roach, 2006), so is the need for social justice training. Curriculum development training is given for new teachers to ensure they are familiar with the curriculum and the pacing expected by the school. Child safeguarding, or protection, is an important and necessary training to ensure the safety of students and staff (Committee for Children, 2014). Based on the
information, school leaders may take the initiative in these areas, and collaborate with heads of department to develop a training program for so teachers will feel better equipped to address these topics.

For teachers working in a school environment, their effectiveness can influence student behavior as well as student perspective. While parents will always be at the forefront of a student’s identity or frame of reference, teachers can provide alternative ways of looking at an issue, and give not only solutions, but skills students can use to solve on their own. Allen and Kelly (2015) supported this idea in stating,

When there is consistency from one learning environment to the next and communication and collaboration among educators, children are able to establish connections between lessons, between ideas and processes within a topic, between topics, and between learning from one year to the next. (p. 216)

In the classroom, teachers can provide a safe place for students to explore and understand the world around them.

Another implication from the research is that international schools may hinder the fostering of social justice due to two separate factors. First, four participants felt the time constraints and the curriculum requirements caused a challenge to be able to spend time on other topics of interest, or to go deeper than the text on social justice issues. While all participants did not feel this, it is a consideration, especially for new teachers who are new to the school and curriculum; it can take time getting used to understanding and implementing a new curriculum as well as having to manage extra activities and duties. Second, two participants felt that since parents pay tuition for their children to attend an international school, as a client they often had more influence on their child’s consequences, promotion to next grade level, and used this
influence to have the school listen to and follow their demands. School management and administrators may need to examine this concern and develop a response to this perception.

Additionally, findings from this study may serve as a resource for school leaders and teachers who are seeking to understand a teacher’s perspective on how they instruct and advocate for social justice within international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms. By focusing on understanding how these teachers have coordinated their efforts, the information can be useful for self-reflection and as a challenge to educators to promote the concepts of social justice within their own classrooms, whether at an international or national school setting.

For this researcher, as an educator and administrator, this study allowed reflection of own teaching and how social justice was instructed and advocated for in former classrooms as well as now from an administrative seat. The research data allowed this researcher to process how to support inexperienced and incoming educators to the importance of instructing and advocating for social justice, as well as the need for explicit training rather than relying on implicit expectation. It has created a greater understanding of the role teachers play in guiding students as well as how teachers need strong and consistent support from their leaders.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Further inquiry would be recommended, in relation to limitations of this study and other matters. It would be of benefit to extend this research to a longer period, such as an entire school year. Research across more than one year could also be considered if the study were to expand and include observations of the same students with different teachers.

As the number of participants for this study was small, the results were limited to a small participant sample Further research may also be conducted to include a larger participant pool, including teachers who taught English Language Development (ELD), specials classes, or
foreign language teachers. It would be recommended to expand the participants beyond the main homeroom teachers to all teachers who provide a teaching role for those in Kindergarten to Grade 2 which may provide a fuller perspective and greater data analysis.

It may also be of benefit to consider further research across more than one school or to include a national school for comparison. By including more than one school in the research, there will be greater data and results. While the results of this study were specific to an international lower primary setting, further research could look at a local classroom to investigate if there are similarities or differences.

Further research may include focusing on teachers of younger students, those with Pre-Kindergarten, Preschool, or even Nursery-level classes to see how teachers of young students instruct and advocate for social justice. In the same respect, research can be conducted for older primary students, in Grades 3 to 5, to see how those grade-level teachers instruct and advocate for social justice. Social justice is a topic that affects all and is not something to be labelled or restricted to a certain group of people. “The world faces a variety of social issues . . . and each generation must determine whether they will intentionally engage in efforts to resolve them or will focus their attentions elsewhere” (Bruce-Davis et al., 2017, p. 251). Educators of all grade levels should be prepared and willing to instruct and advocate for social justice.

Lastly, further research can be conducted on two aspect beyond teacher control, first, the values-based curriculum and the role it plays in the classroom if a school has this type of curriculum implemented. Also, how it is implemented as well as the usefulness of the content in providing skills and strategies for teachers and students. If a curriculum does not provide useful resources, it is a weight on the teacher to have to plan and implement. Second, the preparation and training school leadership provides to teachers new to the school. Research examining or
comparing not only schools who provide to schools who do not provide, but also the training as a tool itself, to investigate if it is of use and benefit to staff and students.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided final discussion on the research study, a discussion of the themes, from the context of literature, limitations, implications, and considerations for further research. A single intrinsic case study examined how teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in international Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms. The research was conducted in an international school in Asia, home to a diverse cultural population of students, mainly from Asia. Although incorporating social justice into a lower primary classroom has its challenges and benefits, prior to this research, little was known of how the research location participants would feel they instruct and advocate for social justice with their students.

The research question was fully addressed through this study. The participants were able to provide relevant information in the form of opinion, experience, shared ideas, and anecdotes to represent how they instructed and advocated for social justice in their classrooms. The outcomes of this study resulted in three key findings, verbal and nonverbal communication is essential to understanding and recognizing social justice; an awareness of culture is important in preparing to understand and successfully manage a multicultural classroom, and organizational culture plays a key role in advocacy of social justice. The findings allowed for a closer insight into social justice in the lower primary classroom and how teachers instructed and advocated with their students. These results will allow educators in the future to look at how they instruct and advocate for social justice in their own classrooms and how they can develop the skills and environment to promote the understanding, growth, and healthy exploration for students in a social justice context.
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Appendix A: Focus Group Outline and Script

Welcome

Hi, and welcome to this focus group meeting. My name is Victoria and I will be conducting a research study on social justice within the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom. I am focusing on the multicultural, international school for this study and will be using data collected from this group discussion, semistructured interviews, and classroom observations. The purpose of the study is to understand how and if teachers advocate and instruct for social justice within the classroom and how this advocacy and instruction is utilized to promote the development of active members of a society that support diversity, equality, and advocate for social justice.

Review Guidelines

In today’s discussion, I am not looking for a certain answer, just respond from your own perspective; there are no rights or wrongs. This will be audio recorded, so please be considerate of others when they are talking and wait to speak. While you do not need to agree, you need to listen to another person’s opinion; this is not a debate or argument.

While we are meeting, to respect the time of myself and others in the room, all mobile phones must be silenced and placed in bags or face down on the table. If a phone call must be taken, please leave the room and return as soon as possible. This meeting should take between 20–40 minutes. Any questions or concerns before we begin?

Focus Group Questions

Thank you again for participating in today’s focus group, I will be asking a series of six questions at this time. If at any time you would like to return to a previous question, please let me know and inform me which question you are referring to, thank you.
1. Would you agree with the following definition of social justice in education? Why or Why not?

Definition: Social justice in education “means guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (Cochran-Smith 2004 as cited in Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 8).

2. What part of this definition stands out to you? Why?

3. How do you feel you can advocate for social justice within your classroom?
   a. Do you do this?

4. In what ways does the school culture/environment promote (or not promote) social justice?

5. How do you feel you can improve the understanding of your students’ awareness of social justice?

6. Do you have an example or situation you would like to share regarding students within the Kindergarten to Grade 2 age group at this school?

Wrap Up

Thank you for coming today and discussing this topic together, I appreciate your time and participation.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Hi, welcome and thank you for meeting with me today, I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. As mentioned in the focus group, I am be conducting a research study on social justice within the Kindergarten to Grade 2 classroom. I am focusing on the multicultural, international school for this study and will be using data collected from the group discussion, this semistructured interview, and classroom observations. The purpose of the study is to understand how and if teachers advocate and instruct for social justice within the classroom and how this advocacy and instruction is utilized to promote the development of active members of a society that support diversity, equality, and advocate for social justice.

Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns? Great, let us begin. If you think of something that pertains to a question we have already discussed, feel free to jump back to the question if you would like to provide more information or clarification of your response.

1. How do you define social justice in education?
2. What experiences or perspectives led you to this definition?
3. Do you feel there is a need for social justice in education? Why or why not?
4. How do you feel you advocate for social justice with your students?
5. Do you feel you have opportunity at this current school to pursue the instruction of social justice? Why or why not?
6. How do you think your students understand the concepts of social justice, diversity, and equality?
7. How do you feel the multicultural aspect of the students affects social justice understanding and awareness in your classroom?
8. After a discussion, how can you assess if your students understand social justice?
Appendix C: Participant Permission Form

**Research Study Title:** Social Justice in the K–2 Classroom  
**Principal Investigator:** Victoria Atha  
**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland  
**Faculty Advisor:** Brianna Parsons

**Purpose and what you will be doing:**
The purpose of this survey is to observe how teachers instruct and advocate for social justice in the Kindergarten to Grade 2 international classroom. We expect approximately eight volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on ___11/25/2019_____ and end enrollment on ___06/25/2020_____. To be in the study, you will participate in a focus group meeting, meet individually for a semistructured interview, and core values-based lessons. You will also be asked to review the transcripts from the focus group and individual interview to check for accuracy. Interviews/Focus Group will be recorded. Recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member-checking. Participating in the focus group and completing the interview should take no more than two hours of your time.

**Risks:**
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside my personal data device. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will always be kept private and then all study documents will be destroyed three years after we conclude this study.

**Benefits:**
While there are no direct benefits to you, the information you provide will offer greater clarity on how social justice presents in the lower primary classroom and what a teacher’s role is in the advocacy and instruction of social justice with young children. You could benefit this by being able to understand how young children in a multicultural, international setting interact and set assumptions, as well as how a teacher can benefit from understanding and correcting misperceptions while advocating for social justice and focusing on diversity, fairness, and equality.
**Confidentiality:**
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety. Real names will not be used, participants will be assigned a confidential number for the researcher for identification purposes. All paper based and electronic data will be kept in locked storage and destroyed at the completion of the study.

**Right to Withdraw:**
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Victoria Atha, at [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, (email or call).

**Your Statement of Consent:**
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_______________________________                   ___________
Participant Name                   Date

_______________________________                   ___________
Participant Signature                   Date

_______________________________                   ___________
Investigator Name                   Date

_______________________________                   ___________
Investigator Signature                   Date

Investigator: Victoria Atha email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Brianna Parsons
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon  97221
# Appendix D: Code Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Description/Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenge self</td>
<td>to try something new or different, take a risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manage emotions</td>
<td>identify, label, or control emotions on own or when interacting with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compassionate</td>
<td>showing compassion or kindness in word or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independence</td>
<td>standing on own, without needing support from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal characteristic</td>
<td>personal preference or choice, personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diversity</td>
<td>being different regarding age, background, culture, race, SES, social status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upbringing/background</td>
<td>personal life experiences and family influences on current perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identity</td>
<td>who you are as a person, what you identify as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem solve</td>
<td>think about solutions to real or simulated problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>understand what is being said through words or actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>communicating to someone though words, actions, or gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooperate</td>
<td>work together to complete a common goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>the way in which two or more people interact with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching/instruction</td>
<td>giving information to students in the form of verbal instruction or modelling behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>amount of time given or lacking in instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multi-layered</td>
<td>having more than one layer, angle, or perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need</td>
<td>the understanding that the topic is necessary and desired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value</td>
<td>placing a worth on a topic, need, or idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advocate</td>
<td>support or recommend an idea, theory, or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountability</td>
<td>hold one to what has been said or done, keeping record of actions or words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriate</td>
<td>sharing information that is appropriate for the audience, based on age or developmental level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equality</td>
<td>being equal, having opportunity to get what you need to be successful that is no more or no less than what others around you get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social justice</td>
<td>&quot;An aim for equality, inclusion, and fairness in access and opportunity to resources and power. A belief that citizens in a democratic society should have equal access to resources, including education, opportunities, health, and other basic human rights.&quot; (Geary, 2017, Key Terms in this Chapter section, p.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair</td>
<td>being fair, having opportunity to get what you need to be successful that is no more or no less than what others around you get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acceptance/tolerance</td>
<td>accepting others as they are, or not discriminating against those who are not the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double standard</td>
<td>inequity; not being fair; holding one person or ideal as of more value than another</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Main Theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Codes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Synopsis</td>
<td>•</td>
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<td>Unexpected Cases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Further Reflections</td>
<td>•</td>
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</tbody>
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Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

**Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

**Explanations:**

**What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

**What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.

VAttha

Digital Signature

Victoria Elizabeth Atha

Name (Typed)

April 9, 2020

Date