Arts-Based Education for Social Justice

Samantha Stevens
Educational Studies and Sociology/Anthropology Special Major
Advisors Elaine Allard and Christopher Fraga
Swarthmore College
May, 2015
Abstract

This thesis explores the arts as a potential framework for achieving social justice through the system of education. The author uses her experience as a student-teacher in a charter school with an arts-based social justice framework as a springboard for discussion, identifying points of tension that arise as educators translate social justice theory into practice in today’s schools. Faced with the challenges of oppression and systemic inequality, educators work to transform schools into vehicles for social justice. Some teachers turn to the charter school model in an effort to sculpt environments fit to meet the needs of students from marginalized populations. The author explores theoretical differences in conceptualizing what it means to work for social justice, claiming that the arts is particularly well-suited as a framework for social justice work.

Keywords: social justice, arts education, critical pedagogy, charter schools
Acknowledgements

I owe so much: to all the education professors I have had at Swarthmore; to the students I met in Chile fighting for their right to education; to all those who have inspired me to become a radical educator; to my advisors who have put up with me not meeting any deadlines; to my friends and others how have helped me maintain the mental stability to survive this. Thank you
# Table of Contents

*Abstract* ................................................................................................................................. 2

**Keywords:** social justice, arts education, critical pedagogy, charter schools ........................................ 2

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 3

Chapter One: Introduction ................................................................................................................. 5

  - Student-teaching at FACTS Charter School .............................................................................. 5
  - Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and Cultural Reproduction ................................................. 10

Chapter Two: Social Justice Education .................................................................................................. 13

  - Critical Pedagogy ...................................................................................................................... 15
  - Critical Theory .......................................................................................................................... 15
  - Paulo Freire ................................................................................................................................ 18
  - Multicultural Education and Culturally Responsive Teaching .................................................. 22
  - Culturally Relevant Pedagogy .................................................................................................... 26
  - Social Justice Education at FACTS .......................................................................................... 28

Chapter Three: Why the Arts? Choosing the Arts as a Framework for Social Justice ......................... 32

  - Arts Education Today in the United States .............................................................................. 32
  - Art and Society .......................................................................................................................... 34
  - Defining Social Justice Art ........................................................................................................ 38
  - The Arts as a Framework for Social Justice Education: A Natural Link ................................ .. 41
  - Creative Imagination .................................................................................................................. 41
  - Imagining an Audience ............................................................................................................. 43
  - Critical Consciousness and Critique ......................................................................................... 45
  - Arts-based Social Justice Work of the Past: A Historical Precedent ..................................... 46
  - Social Justice Art at FACTS ...................................................................................................... 47

Chapter Four: Social Justice Education and the Charter School Model ................................................ 50

Chapter Five: Conclusions ................................................................................................................. 59

  - From Reform to Revolution: Building towards a Radical Stance ............................................. 62

Works Cited ..................................................................................................................................... 64
Chapter One: Introduction

Student-teaching at FACTS Charter School

In the fall of 2014, I began working as a student-teacher at Folk Arts Cultural Treasures School (FACTS), a K-8 charter school in the city of Philadelphia. As an Educational Studies major on track to receive PreK-4 teacher certification in Pennsylvania, student-teaching was part of my required coursework. Although I was able to request that I work in a third or fourth grade classroom that would allow me to engage with minority students, it was mostly by the hand of Swarthmore’s Educational Studies department that I ended up at FACTS. My role as student-teacher was predetermined to an extent by certain guidelines established by Swarthmore and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. All student-teachers were required to work full-time for ten weeks with a teacher who would serve as their mentor and offer feedback, and to the greatest extent possible, take on all the responsibilities that their mentor had as a classroom teacher, including: managing the classroom; planning and teaching lessons; designing and implementing various forms of student assessment; assisting with school duties, such as arrival, dismissal, lunch, and recess duty; and participating in faculty meetings, teacher meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. Responsibilities were meant to increase gradually, building up to a two-week long “full takeover” of the classroom, during which the student-teacher took on a full course load and taught independently. Within this general framework, the culture of FACTS and the personality and teaching style of my supporting teacher brought unique definition to my experience.

The school was organized such that classroom teachers were responsible for teaching three subjects; one teacher taught math and science, another taught reading and writing, and both teachers taught social studies. As a result, these two teachers worked very closely with each
other to plan lessons and discuss student progress. Each teacher had a homeroom of 27 students. Teachers taught social studies to their homerooms and taught their two subjects to both classes. I was placed with the reading and writing teacher and therefore taught reading, writing, and social studies during my time there. Each teacher pair has specially trained teachers that work with them to provide extra support in their classroom, including one teacher who works with students receiving English Language Learner (ELL)\textsuperscript{1} services and one teacher who works with students that have Individualized Educational Plans (IEP’s)\textsuperscript{2} or are a focus of the RTI (Response to Intervention)\textsuperscript{3} program. The regular classroom teachers together with the support teachers are known collectively as a team. Additionally, each discipline (math, literacy, social studies) has a coordinator, a teacher that helps provide support to teachers and facilitates discussion among teachers in order to assure that their discipline is setting appropriate goals and expectations for their students and meeting academic state and school standards. My supporting teacher had just entered the role of literacy coordinator when I arrived.

FACTS is located in Philadelphia’s Chinatown North, serving 485 students from a cross section of Philadelphia neighborhoods. The school was founded in 2005 by community organizations Asian Americans United (AAU) and the Philadelphia Folklore Project (PFP). FACTS defines itself as stemming from a history of struggle for: “equity and justice for Asian American and immigrant and refugee students of all races in public schools; public investment and public space in the under-served Chinatown community; and public education that engages children as active participants in working for a just society”\textsuperscript{1}. FACTS was founded in response to this struggle and was the first publicly funded school in the Chinatown neighborhood. The AAU FACTS founding members had a history of public school advocacy and community organizing and hoped a school could systematically address the unique challenges

\textsuperscript{1}http://www.factschool.org/www/factschool_school/site/hosting/FACTS-%20Who%20We%20Are.pdf
associated with race, class, immigration, and language status that families in the Chinatown community face. It was the hope of all of the founding members to “bridge the gulf of isolation, unfamiliarity with institutions, and language barriers that prevent [Chinatown] parents and community members from playing active roles in the education of their children”\(^2\). While FACTS was designed to address the particular needs of the largely immigrant, Asian Chinatown population, FACTS founders also intended to create a multi-racial/multi-ethnic school that would serve as “a model of anti-racist education that not only values diversity but also addresses inequalities and promotes justice…helping children work cooperatively in a diverse, multicultural society”\(^3\). Although Asian students are still the majority at FACTS, 68% of the student body, FACTS has experienced an increase in non-Asian students and now has a student body that is 19% Black, 4% Latino, 1% White, and 8% Multiethnic\(^4\). The FACTS community has engaged in discussion in response to this observed change to consider how to honor the intent of the original founders while maintaining an inclusive community that adequately meets all of its students’ needs.

FACTS’s mission is to “provide children with an education which has high academic standards, is truly community based, incorporates and respects the lives of students and their families, engages students in understanding their own cultures and communities, and engages students in understanding their role as active participants in working for a just society”\(^5\). Contributing to FACTS’s mission are several distinguishing characteristics of FACTS, including (1) its folk arts-based curriculum, (2) its use of collaborative teaching methods, (3) its Chinese language program, (4) and its ELL services.

\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^5\) http://www.factschool.org/www/factschool_school/site/hosting/FACTS-%20Who%20We%20Are.pdf
FACTS sees folk arts as the unifying thread across the diverse school body. Through FACTS’s partnership with the Philadelphia Folklore Project, all FACTS students have the opportunity to participate in a folk arts residency led by a master folk-artist, such as a Liberian storyteller, a Tibetan sand artist, a Capoeira master, or a Chinese shadow puppeteer. Students also may choose to participate in one of several ensembles, which include Vietnamese Đàn tranh, African American step dance, Chinese Lion Dance, African dance, and Chinese opera. Teachers are able to participate in a folk arts committee, which meets monthly, and all teachers are encouraged to incorporate folk arts into their teaching. FACTS believes that the folk arts program teaches students: “to recognize the contributions of ordinary people as artistic beings and culture makers; to understand and embrace their own cultural identities; and to respect and appreciate the cultures of others. Folk arts strengthen children’s spirits and their communities”.

All students attending FACTS take Mandarin Chinese, either in the class for heritage speakers meant to “afford students an opportunity to retain and strengthen their bilingual skills”, or in the class for non-heritage speakers meant to “introduce students to an important world language…and the value of language diversity”. FACTS views the teaching of Mandarin as strongly tied to its emphasis on Community Learning and valuing students’ cultures, as it is the primary language of the neighborhood in which FACTS is located. More than two-thirds of FACTS students speak a language other than English at home, and these students together represent more than 11 distinct languages and/or dialects. FACTS routinely communicates with families in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

6 http://www.factschool.org/resources/about-us/facts-who-we-are
7 Ibid.
including written translations of all documents sent home to parents and guardians. Students are assessed when they enter FACTS, and those in need of support receive ELL services.

It was not until after my semester at FACTS ended that I determined it would play a role in my research project. The end of my time at FACTS prompted me to engage in self-reflection, both about what my time at FACTS had meant to me personally, and about what my experiences had to offer me as I began to develop my identity and career as an educator. I was inspired to find that there were educators who saw value in the arts, as I did and had fought to make a place for them in an education system that seemed to be saying that they were an unnecessary accessory to student learning. I realized there was a place for people like me who loved the arts, were dedicated to empowering youth and working for social justice, and believed that those two passions did not have to be mutually exclusive. I was left with both a sense of greater clarity and a series of questions. I had a more concrete idea of how a school could translate a theory of arts-based education for social justice into practice, but I knew that not every group of educators with the same set of passions and goals would interpret and apply the theory in the same way. I wondered then, what were the possibilities for schools dedicated to arts-based education for social justice throughout the United States? What kind of arts work were people doing in the name of social justice? What is it like to do social justice work within the U.S. public education system, and what are the conditions that allow this kind of work to take place? Having these questions caused me to view my experiences at FACTS through a new lens. I began to think about how FACTS as a model could speak to the US education system, particularly to other educators hoping to craft schools dedicated to using the arts for social justice work in their own communities. This project is my attempt to answer that question.
Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and Cultural Reproduction

In order to understand the work that educators are doing to create learning communities defined by an arts-based education for social justice model, it is necessary to first understand what motivates them. Educators aim to make social justice a framework for learning, not just because they believe it is important for students to learn about injustice, but because schools themselves play a role in creating and perpetuating systems of inequality. Schools are in a particularly powerful position because of their role as cultural institutions. This paper will reference an understanding of the relationship between schools, culture, and art that stems from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital and reproduction.

Bourdieu's theory explains the process by which individuals are explicitly and implicitly taught to act in a way that identifies them with specific interconnected groups, giving them certain forms of capital, or bodies of knowledge and ways of understanding. Through a long process of "inculcation" or "adaptation," individuals develop a "system of durable, transposable dispositions," which incline them to act in specific situations in a particular way that although it follows a code, may not be conscious and may become second nature. Individuals involved in any given field will compete for control of interests and access to limited resources within that context. One central form of competition involves economic capital, but Bourdieu explains that "interests and resources at stake in fields are not always material, and competition among agents...is not always based on conscious calculation". This leads to the theory of cultural capital, which outlines how competition can also be for "authority inherent in recognition, consecration, and prestige". "Like economic capital, the other forms of capital are unequally distributed among social classes and class fractions" (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993: 7).
Theorists have linked Bourdieu's theory to education by demonstrating the process by which, through “rules of conduct, classroom organization, informal pedagogical procedures used by teachers with specific groups of students, teacher expectations, grading procedures, and the physical learning environment,” schools promote certain “ways of talking and acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language, practices, and values (McLaren 2009: 75, 80).” The implementation of these norms, and a narrative which presents them as natural and superior, serves to “usher students into consensus, socializing them to support the interest of the ruling elite, even when such actions [are] clearly in contradiction with the students’ own class interests” (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009: 6). “Students from the dominant culture inherit substantially different cultural capital than do economically disadvantaged students, and schools generally value and reward those who exhibit that dominant cultural capital (which is also usually exhibited by the teacher).” (Bell and Griffin 2007: 81)

Likewise, schools systematically devalue the cultural capital of the students who occupy subordinate class positions.

Social justice education exists as an attempt by theorists, policy makers, and educators to systematically dismantle the oppressive structures at work today in the United States education system. While SJE takes the oppressive nature of the education system as a given and uses it as a springboard for discussion and action, it should be noted that theorists and practitioners within the field of education and within the social sciences have sought to outline, at great depth and breadth, the ways in which student populations are barred from access to resources and social mobility along race, socio-economic status, gender, mental and physical ability, and nationality lines (Ladson-Billings 1995) (Gay 2000) (Delpit 1996) (Kim, Losen, and Hewitt 2010)

In order to set the groundwork for discussion, I will first establish a limited version of the Social Justice Education framework, reviewing the disciplines which have contributed to it, including but not limited to Multicultural Education, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Critical Pedagogy. I will identify the principles derived from these disciplines which provide the foundation for Social Justice Education.

In the second section, I will discuss the decision of many educators doing arts-based social justice work to turn to the charter model in order to meet their goals. I will explore what it is about charter schools that these educators have found to be more conducive to their work. Although I will not present a complete, detailed outline of the argument, I will review briefly the pushback that both theorists and practitioners have given to the charter school model, acknowledging that while it has allowed for the creation of exemplary innovative schools, charters not had a consistently positive impact on the students that attend them and the communities in which they are situated.

In the final section, I will establish the link between the arts and social justice work, outlining the ways in which the same theory that defines social justice education informs social justice art. Using theory presented by those who have designed and facilitated social justice art educational programs, I will argue that there is a natural link between the arts and social justice, making the arts a particularly fitting framework for social justice education work.

Within each section, I will establish a mutual exchange between FACTS and the theory, looking at what they have to offer each other, where there is tension between them, and where one or the other seems to fall short.
Chapter Two: Social Justice Education

Social justice education exists as an attempt by theorists, policy makers, and educators to systematically dismantle the oppressive structures at work today in the United States education system. While SJE takes the oppressive nature of the education system as a given and uses it as a springboard for discussion and action, it should be noted that theorists and practitioners within
the field of education and within the social sciences have sought to outline, at great depth and
breadth, the ways in which certain student populations are barred from access to resources and
social mobility along race, socio-economic status, gender, mental and physical ability, and
nationality lines (Ladson-Billings 1995) (Gay 2000) (Delpit 1996) (Kim, Losen, and Hewitt,
2010) (Sadkev & Sadkev 1985) (Bourdieu 1977) (Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin 2007)
(McLaren, 2009). Research has documented the process, whereby through “rules of conduct,
classroom organization, informal pedagogical procedures used by teachers with specific groups
of students, teacher expectations, grading procedures, and the physical learning environment,”
schools promote certain “ways of talking and acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms
of knowledge, language, practices, and values (McLaren 2009: 75, 80),” ways of thinking that
align with the White upper class. The implementation of these norms, and a narrative which
presents them as natural and superior, serves to “usher students into consensus, socializing them
to support the interest of the ruling elite, even when such actions [are] clearly in contradiction
with the students’ own class interests” (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009: 6).

Scholars from various disciplines have acknowledged the oppressive nature of the United
States education system and have developed theories which frame the discussion in distinct
ways, according to their understanding of the following questions: What is the source of the
inequality that students experience? What can be done to disrupt the correlation between student
outcomes in school and social identity categories? What does it mean for an educational
institution to be anti-oppressive and working towards social justice? What are the roles of
students and teachers in this process? It would be impossible to identify each work, ideology,
field, and movement that contributed to what is known as Social Justice Education, or to create a
discrete timeline of its development. Most theorists recognize SJE as stemming from a long
historical legacy of radical social thought and progressive educational and social movements, including Black and civil rights movements (and the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements that followed), women’s rights movements, and anti-war movements of the 60’s and 70’s (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009) (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007). Due to the scope of this chapter, I will not review the invaluable contributions of these movements to the development of a social justice theory of education; however, in order to highlight SJE's foundational principles and note important points of deviation and tension, I will outline significant contributions from the ideological frameworks of Critical Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Multicultural Education.

**Critical Pedagogy**

**Critical Theory**

Critical theory was developed in Germany in the 1930s by theorists of the Frankfurt School, initially Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Eric Fromm, and later Jürgen Habermas and Antonio Gramsci. The influence of the historical context is unquestionable, as “the rise of fascism and Nazism, on the one hand, and the failures of orthodox Marxism, on the other...the power of capitalism to assert economic and ideological control, and the failure of both the European and Western working class to effectively oppose it,” marked German society and discourse (Giroux 2009: 29, 30). The Frankfurt school, therefore aimed to pose a rejection of orthodox Marxism, a critique of late capitalism and a psychoanalytical view of domination (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009: 24). Although the historical context could be assessed for its own sake, in this case, I note the origins of the theory only to highlight the concept of the “historicity of knowledge”.
Henry Giroux, the first to use the term critical pedagogy in his book *Theory and Resistance in Education* (1983) emphasizes that “critical theory was never a fully articulated philosophy shared unproblematically by all members of the Frankfurt School” Despite the great diversity among the theorists that worked within the Frankfurt School, Giroux notes how the central principle of critique was not only a school of thought, but also a process. The Frankfurt theorists were united, therefore, by “a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions,” which by nature opens itself up to the same examination that it demands (Giroux 2009: 27). A more in depth review of the Frankfurt School, such as the one conducted by Giroux, would result in a presentation that portrays the diversity among the theorists and their unique contributions to critical theory. My goal here, however, is only to review the ways in which CT, mainly the defining principle of criticality, contributed to the development of Critical Pedagogy. Moving forward and considering how educators can apply CT, I will echo Giroux’s important clarification that CT (or any theory applied to education) cannot be viewed as a script for social justice education. “Any attempt to use such work will have to begin with the understanding that it contains a number of shortcomings and moreover cannot be imposed in grid-like fashion onto a theory of radical pedagogy” (Giroux 2009: 49). This means that CT itself must be viewed critically by any educator that turns to it for guidance. Educators must consider the particular context of their school and consider where the principles of critical theory may be helpful.

Within CT, the concept of the historicity of knowledge recognizes people and actions as historically situated and supports the notion that all knowledge is created within a historical context, which “gives life and meaning to human experience” (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2009: 10). Critical theorists used this concept to frame their understanding of critique, one of the
main vehicles through which they aimed to challenge and overcome domination. By recognizing knowledge as socially constructed, no framework or ideology is free from consideration. Critique, then, serves as “a powerful lens of analysis from which social inequalities and oppressive institutional structures can be unveiled, critiqued, and most importantly, transformed through the process of political engagement and social action” (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009: 23). CT theorists understand critique to be effective only when embedded within dialectical theory.

Dialectical theory explains that the process of critique requires metacognitive self-reflection, or “thought about thinking itself, in which the mind must deal with its own thought process just as much as with the material it works on” (Giroux 2009: 45). Dialectical theory also allows us to frame the conversation on inequality and oppression in a way that includes individual experiences while still acknowledging the hegemonic nature of oppression (i.e. the use of consensual social practices, forms, and structures by the elite to maintain domination). Within dialectical theory, problems which are experienced by individuals are not seen only the experiences of individuals, not isolated events but rather the results of a deficiencies within the structure of society. Critical theory emphasizes how these structures which shape our daily experiences have been shaped by history. Acknowledging the role of history in critical theory becomes important both within CT and as a means of understanding how critical theory itself was shaped by the particular historical moment in which it was created.

By considering the historical context within which the theorists of the Frankfurt School developed Critical Theory, we can also better understand how other theorists drew upon their work in order to form a Critical Pedagogy of education. Educators ask, then, what can we gain by applying critical theory to assess schools, classrooms, and teaching? The historicity of
knowledge serves as an invaluable tool in the classroom to assess both pedagogy and content, as it moves teachers to consider how the content they teach has been socially constructed and produced within a particular historical moment and under particular historical conditions. The historicity of knowledge pushes teachers to see the "hidden curriculum" of schools--the messages that are conveyed beyond those related to the content being taught. Through the hidden curriculum, teaching reproduces dominant cultural assumptions, presenting them as given and perpetuating asymmetrical power relations. Teachers are made to engage in the process of critique with their students, not just of the content learned and its potential place within a hegemonic ideology, but also the school itself and the role that it may play in perpetuating inequality. With dialectical theory, teachers are reminds to look both outward and inward, also engaging in the same self-reflection that they will demand of their students. "Ideology provides teachers with the necessary insight and language to examine how their own views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through the commonsense assumptions they employ to structure classroom experiences" (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009: 10-12).

Paulo Freire

The concepts derived from the theorists of the Frankfurt School—the historicity of knowledge, dialectical theory, and critique—were further developed and transformed for educational practice as educators placed them into conversation with the work of other theorists. Recognized today as one of the central founders of Critical Pedagogy, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) outlined ways in which a critical social consciousness, *conscientizacao*, could be developed and applied to schools and to teaching, aligning theory and practice through what he called praxis. Theory, in this view, is valuable
because of the potential it has to inform our attempts to transform asymmetrical relations of
power. His concept of praxis is driven by an acknowledgement of the necessity to maintain a
mutualistic relationship between theory and practice. Either one alone loses its power for
transformation—“Cut off from practice, theory becomes abstraction or ‘simple verbalism.’
Separated from theory, practice becomes ungrounded activity or ‘blind activism.’ Praxis, then, in
the school context means maintaining an ongoing interaction of reflection, dialogue, and
action (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009: 13).

For Freire, schools’ ability to fulfill their full potential as vehicles of transformation,
rather than oppression lay in the nature of the student-teacher relationship, which ideally takes
the form of a “teacher-student with student-teachers”. Freire proposed a “problem-posing model
of education”, which he saw as countering the traditionally used “banking model of education”.
In the banking model, students become “containers” to be “filled by the teacher, and education
thereby becomes an act of depositing in which “students patiently receive, memorize, and
repeat”. As a result of this banking process, “[students] are filed away through lack of creativity,
transformation, and knowledge”. The teacher monopolizes the processes of teaching, knowing,
thinking, talking, choosing, and acting. They have absolute authority, taking on the role
of subject of the learning process, and deferring students to the role of mere objects. Although
students receive information, they lack knowledge because “knowledge emerges only through
invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [people]
pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 2009: 52-53). Through his
emphasis on praxis and the application of a critical consciousness to education, Freire highlights
the need for the methods used in the name of emancipatory teaching to match the ultimate goal.
Educators cannot hope to help students gain the tools they need to transform their own realities
by using methods which mirror and reinforce the oppressive forces that structure their lives. He notes the ways in which the process of storing information, the basis of the banking concept of education, prevents students from developing the skills and qualities that contribute to a critical social consciousness.

"The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited them" (Freire 2009: 53).

The teacher’s aim according to Freire, however, goes beyond the development of critical consciousness. It is not enough for students just to become aware of their realities and engage in critique. While it is important for students to be aware of the ways in which schools condition them to occupy a certain space within society (Anyon 1980), critical pedagogy requires that teachers and students move beyond awareness to transformative action. "The truth is...that the oppressed are not ‘marginals,’ are not [people] living ‘outside’ society. They have always been ‘inside’—inside the structure which made them ‘beings for others.’ The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’" (Freire 2009: 54). Skills such as code switching (Molinsky 2007), which teach students to adapt in order to ascribe to oppressive standards and be successful in settings designed for domination, may be seen as immediately useful but cannot be seen as a part of a truly emancipatory education. According to Freire, emancipatory educators must only utilize practices which ultimately seek to guide students in achieving their full liberation from oppression. "In the revolutionary process, the leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of later behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say,
dialogical—from the outset. (Freire 2009: 60) If educators expect students’ reflection to lead to action, it is especially important that the process does not end with students becoming aware of the ways in which oppression has shaped their lives. Critique and awareness are only a disservice to students if not followed by empowerment.

For students from marginalized populations, awareness alone may lead to an acceptance of the way things are and a belief that the inequality they experience occurs naturally. As Bell (2007) explains, “Internalized subordination includes such feelings as inferiority and self-hatred and often results in self-concealment, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratitude for being allowed to survive” (11-12). She is also careful to note that members of advantaged group also experience consequences as a result of oppression, albeit consequences of a different nature with different societal implications. “Internalized domination includes feelings of superiority and, often, self-consciousness, guilt, fear, projection, and denial” (12). Bell’s discussion of oppression as detrimental to members of both advantaged and targeted groups reflects Freire’s belief that working for social justice requires fellowship and solidarity and that oppression dehumanizes everyone. “No one can be authentically human while [they prevent] others from being so (Freire 2009: 60). To avoid perpetuating the experience of education as a dehumanizing process, educators must help students to develop both the framework and the skills they will need to confront and transform oppressive structures as they encounter them in their daily experiences. In addition to a critical consciousness, students must also learn to think creatively and imagine how their realities might be different. “To [take action] authentically [students] must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging” (Freire 2009: 59). Equally important, students must be able to understand how seemingly isolated events are connected and how theoretical discussions of
power dynamics are present in their own lives. “They [must] apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question (Freire 2009: 57).”

It is important to note that critical pedagogy has not been unanimously accepted, despite its aims. Scholars have criticized critical theory, claiming issues in regards to feminism, language use, and the essentialization of knowledge. For a review of these critiques, see (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2008).

Drawing on Freire’s discussion of the teacher-student relationship and the function of the education system, educators have developed fields dedicated to leveling the power dynamic between teacher and student and interrupting education's role in perpetuating systems of inequality. The first fields, multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching seek to do this by altering the role that culture plays in the classroom.

**Multicultural Education and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

In their book “Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education”, Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, two educators who have been central to discussions within this discipline for over two decades, outline a model of Multicultural Education (ME) (2008). They acknowledge the diversity that exists within their field and therefore define what they see to be the specific goals of ME. Necessary components include: tackling inequality and promoting access to an equal education; raising the achievement of all students and providing them with an equitable and high-quality education; and giving students an apprenticeship in the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society (2008: 10). Nieto and Bode view ME as working towards social justice, which they define as “a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and
generosity”. (2008: 11) They take a strong stance on what it means to work for social justice, claiming that ME must confront inequality and stratification in schools and society. They note that,

“helping students get along, teaching them to feel better about themselves, and ‘sensitizing’ them to one another are worthy goals of good educational practice…but if multicultural education does not tackle…stratification and inequity and if viewed in isolation from the reality of students’ lives, those goals can turn into superficial strategies that only scratch the surface of educational failure” (2008: 10).

In order to promote democracy, ME must also take the betterment of society as its aim. Teachers must encourage and prepare students to contribute to the general well-being of society, not only to their own self-interests. It is inadequate, therefore, for schools and teachers to stress learning to take tests or working towards getting into a good university at the expense of critical thinking and reflection.

According to their model, Multicultural Education, as Social Justice Education, must include four components: (1) It must challenge, confront, and disrupt misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on race, social class, gender, and other social and human differences; (2) It must provide all students with the resources necessary to learn to their full potential (including both material resources and emotional resources). This may require reforming school policies and practices, especially those which allow for high-stakes testing, tracking, student retention, and segregation; (3) It must draw on the talents and strengths that students bring to their education; and (4) It must create a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change (2008: 12). ME must also reflect seven basic characteristics. ME is antiracist education; it is part of the regular curriculum; it is important for all students; it is reflected in curriculum,
instructional strategies, and student-teacher-family interactions; it is a process; it is education for social justice; and it is critical pedagogy (Nieto & Bode, 2008: 44).

By clarifying that ME is important for all students, Nieto and Bode break down the misconception that multicultural education is only for students of color, urban students, or “disadvantaged”/“at risk” students. At the same time, they counter claims that ME is irrelevant and unnecessary in settings with majority White populations. They acknowledge the original context which caused people to define ME in this way. Stemming from the Civil Rights Movement, the discipline of ME was meant to meet the needs of students who historically had been most neglected or miseducated by the schools, particularly students of color. Activists called for education which would bring attention to their histories, cultures, and experiences of students of color. Nieto and Bode explain how especially then, but even today as Eurocentric curricula persist, the insistence on the integration of the experience of marginalized peoples, and the contributions they have made to society into curricula is entirely justified.

Culturally Responsive Teaching stemmed from this same history of attempting to counter white supremacy, institutionalized racism, and its manifestation in the public school system as Eurocentric curricula and biased teaching practice. Geneva Gay, another prominent voice in the field of Multicultural Education acknowledged a need for systematic, holistic, and targeted reform interventions and began to theorize under the banner of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Gay’s theory is also predicated on the stance that institutional structures, procedures, assumptions, and the operational styles of schools, classrooms, and society at large create and perpetuate inequality (2000). More specifically, her theory identifies a discontinuity between the school and low-income students and students of color as the central factor in these students’ low academic achievement. In response, she suggests that minority student achievement can and will
increase if schools and teaching are altered to better reflect and draw on the culture and language of these student populations. The goal is to structure education in a way that allows all students, not just White upper class students, to experience a parallel between the school and the home community.

For Gay, a major part of making high-status, high-quality knowledge accessible to culturally and ethnically different students is recognizing the worth of the information students gain from their own funds of knowledge, defined by Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (2001) as "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (133) (Gay 2000: xx). Teachers must redefine classrooms to be more at harmony with culturally and ethnically different students and reconstruct the curriculum so that students do not have to choose between learning and doing well in school, and maintaining a sense of pride and belonging within their families and within larger cultural groups. The goal is for all students from different racial, cultural, language, and social class groups to experience equal educational opportunities. Gay posits that the discontinuity between school and minority students’ experience can only be effectively resolved if teachers and administrators attend to each of five dimensions of multicultural education. Like Nieto and Bode, Gay asserts that reform must be pervasive, must involve critical thinking and reflection, and must help students develop positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Gay deviates in her special emphasis on the need for teachers to deliberately incorporate specific aspects of the cultural systems of different ethnic groups into instructional processes and her belief that this is the primary factor in increasing minority student achievement.
Nieto and Bode are careful to note, however, that this integration of traditionally marginalized cultures into schooling should not be seen as something that benefits only those from marginalized populations. It should not be only marginalized students who are encouraged to consider their own stories and histories. “Multicultural Education is, by definition, inclusive. Because it is about all people, it is also for all people, regardless of their ethnicity, ability, social class, language, sexual orientation, religion, gender, race, or other difference” (2008: 50). Nieto and Bode echo Freire’s assertion that all students are harmed by oppression. In a biased, hegemonic education system, “all students are miseducated to the extent that they receive only a partial and biased education. Although it is true that the primary victims of biased education are those who are invisible in the curriculum, everyone misses out when education is biased” (2008, p. 50). They go further to suggest that there is a way in which White students could be seen as in greater need of an ME model. “Students from dominant culture…are generally the most miseducated or uneducated about diversity…they feel that their ways of living, doing things, believing, and acting are ‘normal.’ Anything else is ‘ethnic’ and exotic…These are the children who learn not to question” (2008: 50). Using a multicultural model for education with these students will provide a space in which teachers can help students to confront and resolve their own misconceptions.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Also stemming from critical pedagogy, Gloria Ladson-Billings’s model for culturally relevant teaching seeks to empower students to overcome oppression (1995). She clarifies, however, that her focus is more on how groups can achieve collective liberation than merely how teachers can cause individuals to have a sense of empowerment and make individual efforts towards liberation. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) rests on three criteria or propositions: (a)
Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. Ladson-Billings places CRP in conversation with other models focused on the role of culture in schools. "For almost 15 years, anthropologists have looked at ways to develop a closer fit between students' home culture and the school. This work has had a variety of labels including "culturally appropriate" (Au & Jordan 1981), "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson 1981), "culturally responsive" (Cazden & Leggett 1981; Erickson & Mohatt 1982), and "culturally compatible" (Jordan 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp 1987)" (1995: 159). She is careful to distinguish CRP from those labels which have centered the issue solely in student achievement. While also noting a discontinuity between what students experience at home and what they experience at school, these labels have focused solely on the speech and language interactions of teachers and students. Based in sociolinguistics, these arguments have suggested that students will be more likely to experience academic success if their home language is incorporated into the classroom. CRP does not deny the potential benefits of increasing teacher consciousness of their language practices, however, it posits that we must not only address student achievement but "help students accept and affirm their cultural identities while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings 1995: 159).

In terms of academics, Ladson-Billings emphasizes the importance of literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills within CRP as crucial for students' active participation in a democracy. Acknowledging students cultures, therefore happens within the context of student learning. Teachers do this by using students' culture as a vehicle for learning. Within this model, students are able to demonstrate interest in academic learning without fearing being
ostracized by their peers or abandoning a sense of cultural identity. These individual achievements are only seen as valuable if they are accompanied by the development of a critical consciousness as critical pedagogy proposes. Students must be able to critique cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities (Ladson-Billings 1995: 162). Academic success and critical consciousness are paired, then in that students are able to position themselves to take action and work towards collective liberation. In this model, students move beyond liberation within an oppressive system. Ladson-Billings argues that "culturally sensitive remedies to educational problems of oppressed minority students that ignore the political aspect of schooling are doomed to failure" (Ladson-Billings 1995: 468). Here, Ladson-Billings deviates from Gay's argument, claiming that in an effort to accept and affirm students' cultural identities, the framework Gay promotes actually conforms to dominant norms. For example, Ladson-Billings may argue that using a novel written by an accomplished African American writer in an English class may not be enough. If this novel is introduced within a classroom defined by hegemonic structures, with a Eurocentric definition of what good writing looks like and what purpose writing serves, reading the novel would not really promote educational equality. In the case of this example, a critical social consciousness may involve a discussion of different styles of writing and the structures of power that influence what styles are valued and what guidelines are enforced as standard academic writing.

**Social Justice Education at FACTS**

I spoke one day with an eighth grade teacher who remained in contact with many of her students after they graduate from FACTS and go on, mostly, to public high schools in Philadelphia. Just having celebrated ten years since their founding, FACTS is just now starting to see how their students are doing beyond FACTS. The teacher spoke to me about what that
transition to high school had been like for some of the students, not in terms of academics, but in
terms of entering a new social, cultural environment. She noted that many of them found the
process hard. They had grown accustomed to a school that was very intentional about
recognizing their culture. Many of them had teachers and/or classmates that they were able to
speak with in another language besides English. Despite being from a marginalized population,
they had had the experience of being the majority and interacting with a lot of peers from similar
backgrounds for up to eight years. The teacher spoke in this instance particularly about Asian
students. Many of these students then went on to schools with majority Black, non-immigrant,
English-speaking populations and majority White teachers. If their cultures were recognized, it
was generally limited to isolated instances.

This conversation was eye-opening for me and helped me to broaden my perspective in
many important ways. It emphasized to me the extent that FACTS was dedicated to recognizing
their students’ cultures. It showed me that the school was achieving part of their goal. While at
FACTS, students did not experience coming from an Asian immigrant background as something
that set them apart, something they had to be ashamed of, or something that was at odds with
their school environment. It made me think for the first time, though what it means to be a school
dedicated to this aspect of social justice within a larger system that does not share the same
values. In this case, it showed me that less radical reform can have consequences. Because the
school system itself had not changed as a result of students’ experience at FACTS, it made the
reality of systemic inequality even harsher for them in some ways once they left. FACTS had
focused on preparing students academically for the transition to high school, but not culturally,
socially, or emotionally.
Discussions about how to navigate difficult situations as a minority did happen at FACTS. (In a social studies class, students discussed the adoption of an English-only ordering policy at a local Philadelphia restaurant. Students discussed how this would affect different members of the community in different ways, benefitting some and harming others. They stated their opinion about the policy, and developed their own solutions, referencing their own experiences as speakers of a non-English language, from their parents owning restaurants, or from attending restaurants with different language policies.) Teachers educated students about prejudice, bias, and racism. (A class read Dr. Seuss’s book *The Sneetches* and used it as a platform for a discussion on the intersection of power, identity, and violence. Students rewrite the ending of the book to describe how they could have solved the conflict more peacefully.) These moments did happen, but they were secondary to moments where FACTS was intentional about integrating culture into the classroom. (A Dominican student’s mom came in to talk to the class about their family’s recent trip to the Dominican Republic. She shared stories and a cultural artifact from their trip to *Carnaval*, an annual parade that is valued and highly celebrated within Dominican culture. The student spoke about what it meant for him to attend the parade and to visit his family in the Dominican Republic.) (Around the time of the Chinese mid-autumn festival, students read a picture book about the tradition during their read aloud. An elder in the classroom brought in moon cake, a dessert traditionally eating during the festival, for all of the students to try. In a writing exercise about students first experiences doing something, many students wrote about their first time trying moon cake.) It appeared to me that in order to meet the immediate needs of its students, FACTS had prioritized recognizing and valuing students’ cultures over empowering and preparing students to confront oppression in their daily lives and work towards systemic change.
I was also moved to reflect, as I had been several times throughout my time at FACTS, on what it means to have an increasingly non-Asian student population in a school that was specifically designed to meet that population’s needs. The teacher did not speak to me about what that transition to high school had been like for her Black or Latino students, perhaps because they hadn’t told her. FACTS had made an effort to recognize the culture of Black and Latino students in addition to Asian students, but I couldn’t help but wonder if they experienced recognition and comfortability to the same extent as Asian students. I had noted, in particular, that many of the students identified as having behavior problems were Black students. I sat in on an eighth grade class where students had chosen their own seats, and although students interacted positively with each other, there was a clear divide between where Black and Asian students were sitting. These observations highlighted the complexity of social justice work and the issues that surface in practice that a certain theoretical grounding may not prepare us to anticipate or confront. They also allowed me to think more broadly about how social justice work might vary in different contexts depending on the population. The demographics of the student body and the teachers can introduce a new set of concerns and questions in each context that may not surface at all in others. I realized how it important it is that schools be conscious of how their student body informs the mission they are working towards. I believe FACTS also demonstrates well that the work of critical consciousness is never over. Our theoretical models must evolve as our surroundings do, particularly in the case of schools.
Chapter Three: Why the Arts? Choosing the Arts as a Framework for Social Justice

Arts Education Today in the United States

The United States public education system generally understands arts education in schools to entail "the study of creative works in music, visual arts, dance, or drama/theater and the process of producing such creative work". The most recent national studies, along with the development of national coalitions and foundations dedicated to supporting youth arts education suggest that although for various reasons, and to various degrees, educators and educator researchers believe that the arts should have a place in student learning. Statistics on the availability of arts education in U.S. public schools show a strong presence of music and visual arts programs, with at least 90 percent of elementary and secondary schools offering music since 1999 and at least 83 percent offering visual arts. Dance and drama are consistently less represented at both the elementary and the secondary level, however, and have declined significantly from 1999 to 2010 at the elementary level, with both dance and drama declining from 20 percent to under 5 percent. Dance at the secondary level dropped from 14 to 12 percent from 1999 to 2009, while drama/theater dropped from 48 to 45 percent during the same time.

Although the arts have maintained a presence within the system, statistics show that support is limited; policy makers and administrators may find it sufficient that current infrastructure allows these programs to exist, in whatever form.

During the 2009-2010 school year, of the elementary schools which had arts programs, when asked if they thought the programs received adequate support, 40 percent said that they received very inadequate or somewhat inadequate support in regards to funding, 27 percent in regards to facilities, 23 percent in regards to equipment and materials, and 28 percent in regards to instructional time. Despite extensive research which cites the cognitive, social, personal, and
academic benefits of integrating the arts into education, the arts have suffered immensely from the pressure of a high-stakes testing climate and a lack of resources in many of the schools, particularly in schools that serve marginalized populations (Quinn, Ploof, and Hochtritt 2012: xiii). The arts are often the first area to suffer when schools are forced to make tough decisions about which programs to fund. Funding has also decreased on the state and national level. State arts funding also dropped to historic lows in 2012 dollars, in share of total expenditures, and per capita. Funding of the National Endowment for the Arts decreased in 2011, and total arts funding dropped from 0.40 percent of federal domestic discretionary spending to 0.30 percent between 2002 and 2012. Unfortunately, this means that students who are most impacted by oppressive structures have the least access to a medium which has the potential to provide them a grounds for social justice work. Even if schools have ample resources and value the arts, arts programs can still suffer from the acceptance of a narrative that frames the arts as an isolated extracurricular with limited value (Quinn, Ploof, and Hochtritt 2012: xxi). The idea that the arts deserve a place among other content subjects and that students and teachers would benefit from an arts-integrated curriculum is foreign.

Given this national climate, it is clear that if practitioners have identified the arts as an ideal framework for social justice work, it is not because the arts is the most convenient, readily available option. When practitioners are faced with a narrative that devalues the arts and a lack of funding and other resources, why then do they still choose the arts as a framework for social justice? Why not choose one of the disciplines that the system values and is more willing to fund? If teachers and arts activists are willing to engage in this battle, pushing for a change in the popular narrative surrounding the arts and fundraising to grant their students access to arts resources, they must believe that the arts are particularly well suited for social justice work. I will
present an argument in support of this belief, outlining what I refer to as a natural link between the arts and social justice. First, in order to place social justice art within the broader artistic field, I will reference Pierre Bourdieu's "The Field of Cultural Production," drawing on his concepts of "bourgeois art" and "social art".

**Art and Society**

Social justice art relies on a certain understanding of the relationship between art and society; it reflects the belief that art is positioned to offer a critique of society, critique which can result in fundamental changes. Not all art, however, will be based upon the same framework or take social justice as its aim. I will make the distinction between arts with different aims in order to note that while I will argue that art is particularly suited for social justice work, this does not mean that all schools with arts programs or arts-based curricula are committed to social justice education. Educators must keep in mind that social justice art exists as one form of art among many, and any pieces of social justice art, therefore, will exist alongside, and sometimes in opposition to other artwork. Likewise, I want to avoid suggesting that designing arts-based education for social justice frameworks is simply a matter of getting social justice education and art together in the same room. I will therefore argue that teachers must be intentional about how they position students to engage with art in order for their work to successfully contribute to social justice.

Bourdieu's discussion of art establishes a relationship between cultural practices and broader social processes, linking the social position of artists to the relationship between systems of thought, social institutions, and forms of both material and symbolic power. While Bourdieu speaks mostly of the literary field and is clearly situated in the context of early twentieth century Paris, his observations and claims have broader implications. His theory outlines how codes of
power and domination are extended to cultural practices, in this case, the arts. He explains that 'although they do not create or cause class divisions and inequalities, "art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences," thereby contributing to social reproduction (Bourdieu 1993: 2). As a result, artists do not experience the field of artistry as a clean slate. Rather, they encounter it as an "autonomous universe" with its own codes and rules that determine what is allowed and what has value, codes and rules which artists will interact with differently depending on their position in society (Bourdieu 1993: 163). Positions in society are reflected within the field of artistry as three distinct positions, which exist on a spectrum: “social art”, “art for art’s sake” and “bourgeois art”. In the artistic field, one’s position both depends on and contributes to one’s relation to and moral stance on the social elite, in Bourdieu's case “the bourgeois” within society. For the sake of this argument, I will exclude the middle position, discussing only social artists and bourgeois artists.

Those who have access to elite status and are best positioned to benefit from this position within a social hierarchy are led to be proponents of “bourgeois art”. Those who have no access to elite status and are the least positioned to benefit from it, and rather most likely to suffer from it are led to be proponents of “social art”. Social artists claim that art serves a greater purpose beyond itself and must fulfill a social or political function. "Social artists’ lower position within the [artistic field]…doubtless maintains a circular causal relationship with respect to their solidarity with the dominated, a relationship that certainly is based in part on hostility towards the dominant within the intellectual field” (Bourdieu 1993: 166). Their alliance with dominated populations is both cause and effect. In other words, social artists both maintain that position within the artistic field because they are in alliance with the dominated population, and they
are in alliance with the dominated population because their outsider position within the artistic field gives them a basis for empathy.

The reverse is also true for bourgeois artists. Bourgeois artists are “closely and directly tied to the dominant class by their lifestyle and their system of values, and they receive, in addition to significant material benefits, all the symbols of bourgeois honor, notably the Academy (Bourdieu 1993: 166). Mirroring the circular causal relationship within social art, bourgeois artists identify with the elite because they are involved in a form of art that depends on power and domination, and they are able to take on elite status because of their involvement in and association with the art of the elite. The art of the elite is that art which is recognized by the market. Bourgeois artists are those who are granted access to the art market pace, namely art galleries, through which they experience monetary gain. Artists outside of bourgeois art, however, “invent [themselves] in suffering, in revolt, against the bourgeois, against money, by inventing a separate world where the laws of economic necessity are suspended, at least for a while, and where value is not measured by commercial success” (Bourdieu 1993: 169).

What we can derive from Bourdieu that reaches beyond the context and time in which he was writing is that our cultural practices are embedded within society and will therefore, be shaped by the same codes of power that shape society. "In order to understand what artists...can say or do, one must always take into account their membership of a dominated universe and the greater or lesser distance of this universe from that of the dominant class, an overall distance that varies with different periods and societies and also...with various positions within the [artistic] field" (Bourdieu 1993: 166). We can identify in contemporary United States society art connected to the market which projects monetary gain as a marker of success. This sector within the field of artistry has its own code that an artist must ascribe to in order to achieve monetary
gain. This market is not equally accessible to everyone. Referring again to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, not everyone will learn the code. To the extent that members of marginalized populations are aware of the association between artistic hierarchies and societal hierarchies, they are then positioned to resent art that is linked directly to their domination. It makes sense that "social art" would develop as members of marginalized populations are moved to participate in a central cultural practice but do not want to be implicated in their own systematic oppression. Alternatively, they are able to reconcile their participation in artistry only if that art takes on a social or political purpose which is in their own interest as a member of their given socioeconomic class. Rather than seeking success within a market derived from structural inequality, marginalized individuals form their own sector of art which does not take monetary gain or presence within traditional galleries as its success marker; art is successful to the extent that it is able to counter the art of the elite.

I will add to Bourdieu's discussion a position most often referred to as that of the ally, an individual who because of their position in society (due to an intersection of race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) is able to gain the cultural capital that grants them access to power, but denounces it in an effort to achieve equality for marginalized populations. Allyship may manifest within the field of artistry, causing privileged people to dissociate from the art of the elite and enter alternative artistic spaces dedicated to the art of marginalized peoples. Along the same lines, not every individual that is a member of a marginalized population will reject the art of the elite. Some marginalized artists may gain access to the cultural capital of the elite and aim to learn the code of elite art in order to achieve success, namely monetary gain and social recognition, within that sector of the artistry field. From Bourdieu's discussion of cultural production within the field of artistry, we can locate the derivative of social justice art.
Defining Social Justice Art

As Marit Dewhurst notes in her book “Social Justice Art: A Framework for Activist Art Pedagogy” (2014), the collection of work that has been defined as following the social justice art model represents a diverse body of projects and curricula that have taken different names, including Activist Art (Felshin 1995), Art for Social Change (O’Brien & Little 1990), Theater of the Oppressed (Boal 1979), Art for Democracy (Blandy & Congdon 1987), Community Cultural Development (Adams & Goldbard 2001), and most recently Social Practice Art. Artwork unified by the banner of social justice art, however, may actually reflect different conceptions of what it means to work for social justice and how art can contribute to that goal. Educators’ and artists’ own responses to these questions will determine what they expect of art and how they evaluate it. Loosely defined by Marit Dewhurst, social justice art is artwork that draws attention to, mobilizes action toward, or attempts to intervene in systems of inequality (2013: 7). I think it is interesting to note that this definition is only able to encompass all social justice art by combining what could be seen as three distinct definitions. The first definition, art that draws attention to systems of inequality, suggests that to work for social justice involves increasing social awareness. Art can contribute in this case by educating the public. The second definition, art that mobilizes action toward intervening in systems of inequality, suggests that to work for social justice involves impacting others in a way that moves them to act against systems of inequality. Art can contribute in this case by inspiring viewers and suggesting possible courses of action. The third definition, artwork that attempts to intervene in systems of inequality suggests that to work for social justice involves becoming an active agent for change. Art can contribute in this case by directly contributing in some way to the dismantling of systems of inequality.
As Dewhurst's definition demonstrates, social justice art exists on a spectrum where social impact could range from basic community building to codified political change. Artwork could at any time appeal to one, or all three parts of the definition. Even beyond this spectrum, there are additional concerns when evaluating social justice art. Dewhurst also brings up questions of intentionality and artistic authority. When evaluating art, should the intentions of the artist be considered, or do we look only at the actual impact of the art? Is the power to determine when social justice has been achieved within the artists themselves, or within a critic that was not engaged in the creative process, such as an audience member, or even a policy analyst or social worker (2013: 150)? Again, answers to these questions will be affected by processes of cultural production and the ideological basis of the work. The more radical of an ideological stance an individual or program takes, the more likely it is that they will appeal to the third definition of art that directly interrupts systems of inequality, viewing the first two definitions as a means of achieving this ultimate goal.

As a model which combines two frameworks, arts-based education for social justice also requires educators utilizing the model to consider the defining principles and demands of each framework simultaneously, utilizing each in a way that does not compromise the other. Dewhurst discusses this balance by acknowledging Social Justice Art’s origin in the two strands of art history/art criticism and community organizing. The former involves the historical traditions of art and projects a traditional understanding of artistic success in which art is purchased by collectors and enters into the art market. It emphasizes the final product as site for critiquing, challenging, and documenting (Dewhurst 2013: 145). The latter involves the psychology and sociology of creation and considers art successful insofar as it is able to communicate with, inspire, and motivate people. It emphasizes art as a tool for exploration, advocacy,
and expression. Within both traditions there is room for posing an intervention against inequality and injustice (Dewhurst 2013: 145).

This tension between the two simultaneous aims of Social Justice Art emphasizes the need for Social Justice Art to stem from an awareness of oppression and a developed critical consciousness. “In the absence of [a rich understanding of the structural elements of injustice], the artist may continue to make art about injustice, but will not have the tools necessary to actively engage, dismantle, or otherwise influence the injustice [the artist] seeks to affect” (Dewhurst 2014: 59). Social Justice Art by definition appeals to both of these traditions but because of the stakes involved, the risks of appealing too much to one tradition at the expense of the other can be great. To appeal too heavily to the aesthetics of the work would result in art that is visually pleasing but “does not tip any lever of power”. “Likewise, to create a work that focuses only on the intended impact is to neglect the unique capacity of the arts to viscerally engage a viewer” (Dewhurst 2014). Further, facilitators must consider that a work of art viewed as less than engaging or visually weak may render the work conceptually weak, jeopardizing the legitimacy or severity of the message. Work determined to be aesthetically weak may also lead to assumptions about the artist’s process, which may downplay the mental and physical work that the artist has done. To the extent that deviating from a mainstream conception of aesthetics can be a social justice act itself, artists may decide to create work which appeals to an alternative understanding of aesthetics, knowing that it may not be well-received by certain populations. This decision requires an equal, if not more extensive education on both art practices and on societal manifestations of oppression. Decisions of this nature should also be discussed and informed.
The Arts as a Framework for Social Justice Education: A Natural Link

I believe as Finley (2008) does that “arts-based inquiry is uniquely positioned as a methodology for radical, ethical, and revolutionary research that is futuristic, socially responsible, and useful in addressing social inequalities” (Osei-Kofi 2013: 131). I will demonstrate two ways in which the theoretical thought-based process involved when conceptualizing social justice reflects and complements the cognitive work that goes into the process of conceptualizing and creating art. I will do this by outlining the role that the processes of creative imagination and taking a critical approach are present and central to both social justice work and to art. Finally, I will discuss the roots of arts-based social justice work, locating contemporary efforts as the legacy of groups who used the arts to fight for social justice.

Although I will not discuss specific curricula and research on the integration of the arts and content area subjects, it is also important to highlight the efforts that educators have dedicated to identifying natural links in order to defend the place of the arts within the classroom. This body of work demonstrates that art can indeed take a place in the classroom in a way that complements students learning. For further information and examples of this work, the following works can be consulted (Osei-Kofi 2013) (Bell, Desai, and Irani 2013) (Quinn, Ploof, and Hochtritt 2012) (Riley 2012) (College Board 2012) (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education 2014)

Creative Imagination

The first link between the arts and social justice involves the use of imagination and creativity. In his discussion of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire sets as a necessary part of anti-oppressive work the development of the ability to see one's position not as fated and unchangeable, but as systematically created and susceptible to reform. Students and teachers
must not only see oppression as a result of unequal systems of power, but also believe that they have the ability to contribute to systemic change and be agents of their own liberation. Uprooting and reconstructing a system of oppression requires individuals to work for a world that is intangible, a reality so drastically different from the one they currently inhabit that to translate a critical consciousness into a plan for action requires imagination. Individuals must ground their work on a mental conception of how the world could be different which allows them to identify concrete changes that could transform their daily experience. While imagination may traditionally be associated with a detachment from reality, Freire's form of imagination is one that depends on a close connection to reality. Individuals are only able to imagine a different world by reflecting and developing a critical awareness of the world around them. Freire clarifies, "imagination is not an exercise for those detached from reality, those who live in the air. On the contrary, when we imagine something, we do it necessarily conditioned by a lack in our concrete reality. When children imagine free and happy schools, it is because their real schools deny them freedom and happiness" (2005: 94). They are not imagining just any alternative reality, but one that departs from and seeks to oppose observed conditions.

In the same way, the ability of an artist to arrive at something concrete--a piece of artwork--depends on the artist’s ability to creatively imagine what does not yet exist, to envision the ways in which an idea could be made real and presented to an audience. Stone Hanley links this process to social justice work, explaining "...praxis is a creative process not only in social justice work, but also in the arts where reflection and action are intrinsic to artmaking. Creativity is problem-solving and innovation that...involves work in the art form and in social cultural explorations, and culture is the soil or clay from which to sculpt meaning about and through art about life" (2013: 441). As with social justice work, there is a big leap between the original idea
and the final piece of artwork. If artists wish to arrive at this final product, they must create it. Referring again to Bourdieu, artists create according to the guidelines that exist within the field of artistry. These guidelines include the appeal to a certain idea of aesthetics, a set of principles that determine what is beautiful. They also include working in relation to an established tradition shaped by artists from history, particularly those who achieved a place of high social recognition. Finally, they include knowledge of the actual tools and skills. This includes both knowledge and tools of the larger artistic field (e.g. balance, perspective, contrast, etc.) and those unique to a particular medium (e.g. shading in drawing or texture in painting). Imagination in artistry, therefore, is equally grounded. While the possibilities for individual creative vision are limitless, this vision is grounded in knowledge of the artistic field. Even art that seeks to break from the norm either references the norm in order to intentionally defy it, or establishes its own set of guidelines that follow a different code.

**Imagining an Audience**

Included within the process of creative imagination in both social justice and art is the imagination of an audience. On a large scale, social justice work takes society as its audience. As Freire emphasizes, social justice work, although it involves abstract ideas, is not done on abstract terms. It is work achieved by acting on individuals. Individuals seeking to alter systems of inequality must do so by interacting with the individuals who perpetuate these systems. An individual involved in social justice work must find a way to reach individuals that benefit from systems of inequality and convince them to forfeit a certain degree of power in the name of liberation and collective advancement. Individuals must also reach marginalized individuals and convince them as Freire insists that they can work towards their own liberation. Specifically within the classroom, teachers must reach the audience of their students. While this audience is
more immediate, and therefore not entirely imagined, teachers will never be fully aware of the mental processes that students are engaged in. Teachers make an effort to get to know their students and use what they learn to inform how they teach and construct the classroom environment. For example, if teachers make an effort to first determine what misconceptions students may already have, they can identify points that need to be addressed and anticipate areas that may cause the most discomfort. Still, teachers never fully enter the minds of their students. They must relate to students on a level that allows them to empathize with students, imaging what it is like for students as individuals in particular societal positions to navigate systems of inequality. This imaginative aspect of empathy is particularly salient for teachers working with student populations whose upbringings, socioeconomic classes, or race are different from their own, namely White teachers working with marginalized student populations.

Similarly, in order for an artist to create art that achieves a particular goal, they must create with an audience in mind. This audience could be limited to the artist themselves, could be a specific, discrete group of named individuals, or could be a broader audience defined by a public space such as visitors to an art gallery, people that walk down a particular street, or members of an online community. Regardless of the scope or level of anonymity of the audience, the audience will inform the artistic process. By keeping the audience in mind, the artist can be more intentional about their artistic choices, thereby creating a piece that is more effective at conveying a particular message or evoking a particular thought or emotion (Dewhurst 2014: 59). While there is always a certain distance between the artist's intention and the audience's interpretation, much less is left up to chance when artists are conscious of who will be viewing or interacting with their art. "Just as in verbal language, there are culturally specific modes of communicating that artists must navigate to effectively convey complex ideas". (Dewhurst 2014:
As with teaching, the use of these codes will depend on the artist's relation to their audience. The artist must anticipate whether the audience will consist of people who have had access to the same codes that informed their artistic training and those that they are utilizing to create the artwork.

**Critical Consciousness and Critique**

As I have discussed, social justice education is defined by the development of a critical social consciousness that requires students and teachers to engage in self-reflection, make connections, and hopefully develop plans for action. Marit Dewhurst outlines how this process, "a layered act of inquiry," is reflected in the process of creating art. As students and teachers in an SJE classroom reflect on their position in society, artist’s ability to create depends on their own awareness of their relation to society and requires an anticipation of how the art produced will be placed within the immediate art community and within the larger process of cultural production that art is involved in (Dewhurst 2013: 147). As social justice work depends on a heightened awareness that results from this process of critical reflection, the authenticity of a piece of art depends on the development of a personally meaningful foundation. Artists must identify the personally relevant connections to their own convictions behind the work of art to be created and use those to define a sense of direction to move the project forward (Dewhurst 2014: 39). Once an artist establishes the personal relevance of their art, "topics [which would be] controversial, complicated, or abstract if raised in isolation could be entered into with the confidence of relevant experiential knowledge (Dewhurst 2014: 43). The critical consciousness that is central to social justice work is also present within the artistic world in the form of critique. Artists refine their skills by developing various lenses, which allow them to interpret the work of other artists. By learning to reach conclusions about another artist's work, artists can
refine their own creative process. They are also then in a position to then place their art in conversation with, in opposition to, or as an ode or tribute to another artist's work. In addition to engaging in critique of other work, artists open their own art up to critique. Knowing how to make informed, constructive critiques of other artists' work and being able to offer their own work up for critique will help artists engaging in social justice work to engage in the inward and outward reflection that Freire describes. Artists will be more apt to apply a critical lens to themselves and the way they navigate systems of power and to the world around them.

**Arts-based Social Justice Work of the Past: A Historical Precedent**

My last aim is to honor and highlight the role that the arts have historically played in social justice work. In addition to the connections between the processes of social justice work and artmaking, educators and students engaged in arts-based education for social justice have available to them a rich history which includes examples of groups that have used the arts to target systemic inequality in their own lives. Dewhurst reminds us that in many instances this kind of work precedes the academic disciplines that I have cited that seek to provide theoretical frameworks for action. She cites Eisner (2002) and Mcfee (1998) who said, "Long before there were scholars and critics seeking to name the kind of social justice-infused art practices currently gaining popularity...people were creating art as a way of narrating, shaping, and making meaning of their experiences in the world" (2013: 145). Dewhurst cites specific examples of work in history that has "engaged artistic practices to impact political and cultural understandings, attitudes, and behaviors, [becoming] a powerful tool for social critique and action". This work includes: the freedom songs of the civil rights movement, the Chicano mural movement, the performance pieces of the AIDS awareness campaigns, the rise of Hip Hop, among many others (Dewhurst 2013: 145). In this sense, teachers and students may experience arts-based social
justice work as natural. This historical president may be especially powerful for students from marginalized populations who may identify with certain groups that have historically used the arts to fight for justice. They may find strength, conviction, and solidarity in knowing that their ancestors have treaded similar paths, and in many ways found success.

Social Justice Art at FACTS

FACTS provided me with an interesting context in which to think about the broader field of social justice art. Despite my own heavy involvement in the arts, as a creative writer and dancer, I had never been involved in an arts environment quite like FACTS. Folk arts in particular maintain a unique position in relation to other forms of art. The incorporation of folk arts at FACTS, specifically arts tied to Chinese and Southeast Asian culture, Black, African, and African American culture, and Latino culture, tied the process of cultural recognition within education to the arts. Students then experienced the arts as something which helped them develop positive cultural identity. (A teacher leading a writing lesson on realistic fiction stories echoed Maya Angelou by encouraging her students to write the stories that they wanted to see in the world. This took on a particular meaning for minority students who had limited experience readings books with protagonists from similar backgrounds. As the teacher modeled the writing process, she shared her own story about speaking a different dialect of Chinese and attending Chinese school when she was younger in order to learn Mandarin Chinese.) They also experienced the art as something which would allow them to participate in their own cultural practices and share them with others. (Students who choose to participate in ensembles perform in a showcase each year in front of the entire school and their families. They also have opportunities to perform in community events within Chinatown and in other parts of Philadelphia.) I believe the experience within the arts reflects the broader SJE experience of
FACTS, which I have identified to mostly emphasize cultural affirmation and recognition. By choosing a framework centered on folk arts as opposed to other forms of art, I believed FACTS implicitly proposed a framework which in many ways countered what Bourdieu called bourgeois art. Students’ participation in art was also tied with the development of counternarratives and the ability to increase the presence of marginalized cultures within the field of art.

I was thankful to have had the opportunity to witness educators who not only worked to provide students with access to the arts, but also worked to bring the arts into the classroom and believed that the arts would complement and enhance student learning. During my time at FACTS, teachers and administration were engaged in a discussion about how to integrate folk arts into the curriculum in order to bring the arts into the classroom and not limit the presence of the arts to art classes or folk art ensembles. (As a part of teacher evaluation, each teacher at the beginning of the year submitted a personal growth plan in which they set a goal for how they wanted to improve their teaching. Teachers also had to reflect on various aspects of their teaching, one of them being their incorporation of folk arts into the classroom.) (The leader of the folk arts committee at FACTS compiled a series of examples of how different teachers has incorporated folk arts in their teaching and made it available to all the teachers to have as a model when thinking about how to bring folk arts into their own classrooms.) FACTS had not yet made the integration of folk arts fully cohesive and seamless, but their discussions around pedagogy and the curriculum were guided by a commitment to arts-based education, rather than a framework which saw arts education as an addition to “regular” education. Seeing a team of educators attempt this first hand showed me how difficult full integration can be. It led me to believe that schools aiming to effectively use an arts-based education model have to be very
thoughtful about curricular design and pedagogical practices and have some system for sharing ideas and receiving feedback. This process would likely require the advice of specialists on curricular arts integration and teachers who have experience in the arts in addition to experience in their other content areas.
Chapter Four: Social Justice Education and the Charter School Model

As my reflection on FACTS moved me to ask, “Why the arts?” it also moved me to ask why charter schools. Why is it that the founding members of FACTS felt that starting a charter school would be the best way to meet the needs of the largely immigrant Asian community of Chinatown? More broadly, what was it that had caused educators starting schools in their own communities throughout the U.S. to reach the same conclusion? As stated previously, I do not intend for this paper to serve as a blind endorsement for the charter school model. Nor do I aim to suggest that the charter school model is the only means by which arts-based social justice work can be achieved. To address these potential implications, I will construct a limited review of the dangers and risks associated with the charter model and the consequences we have already witnessed in some of the communities in which charter schools maintain a strong presence. I will do this by outlining what defines charter schools and distinguishes them from regular public schools, noting how the charter model has attracted both groups aiming to preserve structures of inequality, and groups aiming to dismantle them.

Now 18 years since Minnesota passed the U.S.’s first public charter school law, there are more than 6,000 charter schools across 42 states and the District of Columbia which educate more than two million students, about 4 percent of the nation’s K-12 students (Ravitch 2014: 158) (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013). These students are more heavily concentrated in urban districts. For example, in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), the 8th largest school district in the United States, 39% of schools are charters, and these charters enroll 45% of the district’s students (School District of Philadelphia, 2014).

Charter schools, like regular public schools, are funded with taxpayer dollars. They also must comply with a number of applicable federal statutes - such as No Child Left Behind
(NCLB), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Internal Revenue Code for (501)(c)(3) organizations; and state statutes - such as the Public Officials and Employee Ethics Act, the Right To Know Act, the Sunshine Act, the Public School Code of 1949 and the Pennsylvania Non Profit Corporation Act. They are also accountable to their authorizer for making academic progress and for fulfilling the terms of both its original charter and its Charter Agreement. They do, however, receive additional private-sector support in some cases and are also able to determine how they spend this funding. In the case of FACTS, this allows them to devote funding to their extensive folk arts program, contributing to student art classes, student art ensembles, and folk artist residencies.

Charter schools are further distinguished from regular public schools in that they can be run and operated by various parties, including nonprofit Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), such as Knowledge is Power Project (KIPP), private, for-profit entities that also provide the school’s curriculum such as the company K12’s virtual charter schools, or community members and organizations, as is the case with FACTS.

Charters may also vary in their hiring processes, as they can hire teachers who are not part of a union or do not have credentials, depending on the state charter laws. To my knowledge, all regular classroom teachers were certified, but FACTS did create positions which you would not find in a traditional school. Members of the Chinatown community, referred to as elders, were hired to work in some classrooms to assist teachers and bring an additional perspective into the classroom. Additionally, FACTS was able to define what roles in the school would look like. The principal, for example, decided she wanted to have an active role in the school which would allow her to interact with students and teachers in addition to attending to
administrative tasks. She stood in the schoolyard in the morning in order to greet students as they arrived. She also visited each classroom at least twice a week, either to observe instruction or just to greet the class.

Charters may deviate from regular public schools if they choose by setting their own calendar apart from the district calendar. The FACTS calendar was more representative of holidays and other days acknowledged within the Chinatown community. They also developed their own annual traditions that reflected the school’s mission and values. For example, each year on the day nationally recognized as “Columbus Day”, a day on which regular public schools are closed, FACTS remains open for what they redefine as “Many Points of View Day”. The day involves an all school assembly and classroom instruction dedicated to discussing different perspectives on Columbus, acknowledging the history of colonization and imperialism in the United States.

Perhaps the greatest difference between many charter schools and regular public schools is their curricula and pedagogical practices. As previously stated, charters are held accountable to meeting certain academic standards, but they have control over how they meet these goals. In the case of school practices, FACTS identified a particular model for classroom management that they believed best suited the school’s culture and mission. After reviewing classroom management theory and research, the school had identified Responsive Classroom as their model. The administration presented a rationale for the Responsive Classroom model, facilitated discussions, and held mandatory training sessions. Additionally, FACTS developed a curriculum specifically meant to address the needs of the English Language Learning (ELL) population. The administration, particularly the principal regularly reviewed literature on English Language Learner instruction and facilitated longitudinal data collection that tracked student progress in
reading and writing throughout their years at FACTs to track student progress. Also along the lines of academic freedom and flexibility, many charters are able to escape, to an extent, the pressure of high-stakes testing. As previously stated, FACTS is still required to demonstrate student performance as outlined in their charter, but they actively spoke out against “teaching to the test”. The Curriculum was aligned according to specific learning goals, rather than test content. Test prep was confined to a short period just before testing took place in the spring.

The original intent behind the charter model was first articulated by Ray Budde, a University of Massachusetts professor, and Albert Shanker the president of the American Federation of Teachers at the time. Budde and Shanker independently but simultaneously envisioned the charter idea in 1988. Budde’s primary goal was to reorganize district management and free teachers from unnecessary bureaucracy. Charters would govern themselves, thereby giving them more freedom and space to find new solutions to pedagogical problems. Shanker aimed to reintegrate disengaged students who had been funneled out of the system. Charter schools would intentionally seek out these students. Freedom to experiment with curricula and pedagogy within charters would provide a valuable resource to regular public schools, as teachers in charter schools would share what they learned (Ravitch 2014: 250).

When charters are built which take the original intentions behind the model as their guide, students from marginalized populations and their families can find in them a refuge from a system which has not made room for them and has chosen not to serve them. As Ravitch understands, those charters which have been successful (not as measured solely by test scores, but in terms of their ability to serve all students and be a positive presence in their surrounding communities) have done so because they have followed a criteria derived from the
intentions of the original founders. Other charters who have not been as successful would do well to also take these criteria as a model.

These charters stem from the communities themselves; they are designed and managed by parents, teachers, and members of the community and local nonprofit organizations for the children of that district. In these schools, the motive of profit has been removed completely from the picture. As Budde and Shanker originally intended, a significant portion of these schools enroll and educate the children who are not succeeding in regular public schools, for whatever reason. They intentionally seek out, rather than deny, students who dropped out or have special needs. They maintain their role as sites of pedagogical innovation, as they explore new ways to educate these students and share what they learn with others in the field. Administrators and teachers within these charters are concerned primarily with serving students, their families, and the communities they come from. They don’t aim to transplant their model uniformly to other communities, and their salaries are aligned with those of the equivalent local district positions. (Ravitch 2014: 250-252).

While there are those who would view all charters as a threat to public education and advocate for their complete eradication, Diane Ravitch identifies how most of the critiques aimed at charters today are rooted in the great extent to which certain charters have strayed from the original intentions of the model’s founders. She is careful to note that if charter schools are denying the very population they were meant to serve and contributing to structural inequality, it is not because the charter model is itself inherently discriminatory and oppressive. She describes how the climate created by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 in combination with strict, zero-tolerance policies led charters to systematically reject the very students they were created to serve (Ravitch 2014: 159). With the pressure created by NCLB to improve test scores, any
school that enrolled the lowest-performing students was doomed to fail. In response, some charters prevented students deemed difficult to teach from even entering and expelled others who later proved to be difficult either in terms of academic performance and/or behavior. Some students were targeted specifically due to their status as ELL students or students with disabilities (Ravitch 2014: 178) (White 2015: 140).

As a result of these practices, charter schools in many cities demonstrate disproportionately high suspension and expulsion rates. The Knowledge is Power Program charter chain, for example, has a nearly 15% attrition rate each year, reflecting predominantly African American students (White 2015: 140). These policies hurt not only the students directly affected, but also the surrounding communities and districts in which the charters are located. Students kicked out of charter schools return to regular public school, leaving the public schools with a high concentration of students who are the most expensive and most challenging to educate. The reverse also hurts public schools, as students’ leaving regular public schools for charters in large numbers causes regular public school budgets to shrink. If enough students leave the regular public schools, they close due to low enrollment (Ravitch 2014: 247, 176). This relationship creates fierce competition, ruins the possibility for collaboration and shared growth, and paints regular public schools as a last resort for students and their families. Perhaps the most detrimental are those charters which are privately managed and transplant their model to various communities, “creating thousands of deregulated, unsupervised, and unaccountable schools, [which open] the public coffers to profiteering, fraud, and exploitation” (Ravitch 2014: 4). In 2013, 20 percent of charter schools were run by non-profit organizations that ran more than one charter school; and 13 percent were run by for-profit companies (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013).
It may be that because the charter model is still in its infancy relative to the public education system itself, we find it harder to imagine the positive potential of regular public schools. The public school system has played an oppressive role for so long now that it is easy to associate the effect with the system itself, making it hard to isolate inherent structural issues from issues caused by the abuse and manipulation of those structures by individuals. I believe that regardless of how fully one may or may not embrace the criteria Ravitch outlines for charters, something important that we can gain from her argument is that the impact of any system or model will be, to a large extent, shaped and determined by the culture and context in which it is imbedded. In a way which reflects Bourdieu’s discussions around capital and cultural reproduction, Ravitch argues, “Our urban schools are in trouble because of concentrated poverty and racial segregation. But public education as such is not ‘broken.’ Public education is in a crisis only so far as society is and only so far as this new narrative of crisis has destabilized it” (2014: 4). If we acknowledge the ways in which the inequality in schools is inherited from larger societal systems and codes, then it would seem that our ultimate goal would be to completely dismantle the system as it is and reconstruct upon an equal and equitable foundation.

Naturally, more deeply and broadly rooted issues will require more radical, intentional, and forceful solutions. It is understandable, then, that an individual or group may forego larger, more systemic change, momentarily or indefinitely, in order to achieve limited, short-term gains that will manifest themselves more quickly and clearly in the lives of individuals. This discussion could be framed in terms of reformism versus insurgency, and it is a discussion that teachers doing social justice within their classroom must confront every day.

“The problem is chicken and egg. To the extent that schooling simply reproduces existing class dynamics, no changes in how schooling works will matter till class dynamics change. But class
dynamics are unlikely to change until a revolutionary or insurrectionary consciousness develops among the young—and their consciousness develops largely through schooling.

What does it mean, then to found a charter school? Founding a charter school within the public school system is a way of “reducing the scale of the task” by “creating a mini-society that will reproduce specific human dynamics”. Within a charter school, teachers and administration can “try to insulate children from the oppressive forces that determine the shape of schooling as an unhelpful or degrading institution” (Gillen 2014: 18) Framing the battle according to these terms implies a certain level of a lack of faith in traditional public schools and the system as a whole. Charter school founders are effectively saying—we do not believe we can accomplish our goal within the regular confines of the system. We are seeking an alternative model because we believe it is more suited to our purposes and will result in greater benefits to our students. This narrative defines traditional public schools as antithetical to social justice education, if not on a large scale, then at the least at the scale of the particular community of the school. In the case of FACTS, the members of Asian Americans United and the other educators and activists involved in the school’s founding conveyed the message that the regular public schools had failed to serve the Chinatown community. They, therefore, were going to serve this community in their own way on their own terms and would need to turn to the charter model in order to do so.

I am led to conclude that in order to dismantle oppressive structures and realize systemic change, educators must fight to do social justice work within the system itself. Rather than deeming regular public schools as lost causes, the future of the public school system in the U.S. will depend on our ability to redesign them to meet the needs of all students, providing equal access to resources and mobility. The only hope for charter schools as an alternative to regular public schools to lead to system change is if they are able to take on the role of “[a healing, self-
replicating ‘virus’ within the ill body of an existing system],” that is if they are able to avoid the traps outlined by Ravitch and honor the original intentions of the founders, and if they collaborate with regular public schools (Gillen 2014: 134). In order for charters to have a broader impact that goes beyond the lives of the students attending the school, they will have to frame the conversation in a way that motivates regular public schools to learn from their example. I am not advocating that regular public schools replicate the models of their neighboring charter schools, but rather that regular public schools look to charters that have found ways to do anti-oppressive work and find a way to do the same kind of work without the freedom that the charter model provides.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

I have aimed in this thesis to place my own experiences as a student teacher at FACTS charter school into conversation with literature from the disciplines of education and anthropology in order to explore the possibilities for arts-based education as a means to achieving social justice. I hope not to offer conclusions in regards to FACTS’s own success with applying their particular model, but rather to use the case of FACTS to highlight the points of tension and questions that arise as educators attempt to translate social justice theory into practice in the United States school system.

The literature on social justice education, informed by many fields within education and many disciplines outside of education, outlines the ways in which the school system, as a cultural institution, has been manipulated to serve the interests of the elite by maintaining systems of inequality. It reminds us, however, that as the education system can be a vehicle for oppression, it has equal potential to be a vehicle for liberation. Social justice frameworks are united by their acknowledgement of the legacy of White supremacy and their belief in the potential for disrupting this legacy. They vary in the extent to which they hope to disrupt this legacy and the means by which they plan to do it.

I am left with the conviction that if we are to reconstruct society along lines of equality, that struggle will be inextricably tied to the system of education. I acknowledge the conditions that might prevent a school from taking a radical stance and actively aiming to cause systemic change, although I believe that if schools take a less than radical stance it should be a conscious choice. Educators should be aware of the depth and breadth of the possibilities offered by social justice education and should know where they stand. If educators and school communities are more aware of the possibilities, I believe they can make more informed decisions and be more
intentional about choosing methods that will contribute to their goal. Social Justice Education is both a process and a goal. By this, I mean that the methods teachers use in the name of social justice must reflect their end goal of achieving social justice. Educators dedicated to teaching for social justice must be self-reflective and critical not only of the content and structure of curricula, but also of their own teaching practices. Additionally, making the radical possibilities a part of everyone’s consciousness will make systemic change seem less abstract and more tangible, making it a more viable option. Students should also be aware of what form of social justice their school aims to achieve and should also learn about the theory that has informed their school’s stance. Radical or not, I don’t think any school should become too comfortable in their stance. It is important that the process of self-reflection and critical consciousness continues and that schools engage in productive conversation with each other.

The literature on social art confirmed for me what I have found to be true in my own experiences as an artist: art is uniquely positioned to assist people in opposing injustice. The selection of the arts as a framework for social justice education, therefore, is not arbitrary. There is a natural link between practices used within the Arts and the critical perspective required for Social Justice Education. Individuals who study, create, practice, and witness various art forms gain experience in creative imagination, reaching an audience, and giving and receiving critique that parallels the processes involved in social justice work. Those engaging in art for social justice also inherit a legacy of art-based social movements that they can draw from in order to combat the legacy of White supremacy and oppression. The arts’ ability to introduce counternarratives into public discussion and present alternate realities couples nicely with the goal to deconstruct systems of inequality and rebuild a society distinct from the one we live in today. Given the oppressive nature of the education system, the arts can be a powerful presence
in schools, particularly for students from marginalized populations. The fight for social justice then is aligned with the fight to gain recognition of the rightful place of the arts in schools and in classrooms. In order for the arts and social justice frameworks to be integrated effectively, teachers must honor the principles of both fields, emphasizing both art training and the development of a critical consciousness, both the aesthetic goals associated with art and social justice aims.

The charter school model provides an opportunity for schools with arts-based social justice models to break free from the aspects of regular public schools that create hostile learning environments for students from marginalized populations and perpetuate systemic inequality. Social justice education requires a break from the education system and necessitates the kind of innovation and flexibility that defines charter schools. Within the charter model, educators and social justice advocates can define unique educational projects that are catered to address systemic inequality both inside the school and out. If not structured properly, however, charter schools have the potential to reinforce and even worsen the caste system that SJE attempts to deconstruct. Charter schools should not be viewed as innately positive or negative and each charter should be reviewed individually on its own terms. Charters must restore their relationship with regular public schools and reinitiate the conversation and sharing of ideas that the original charter model creators envisioned. Charters must set out with the goal of helping to reinvest the public education system with the potential for collective liberation, not with the goal of breaking from the system. Educators and policy makers must view the charter model not as an end in itself, but as a means to meeting all students’ needs. Those seeking to start charters should have a clear sense of the student population and what those students’ needs are. Their educational vision should be carefully crafted with those students in mind.
From Reform to Revolution: Building towards a Radical Stance

Throughout this paper, I have confronted in various forms the question of limited reform versus revolution. Over and over again, I found myself considering what it means to work towards social justice. I found that although social justice work is united by common principles, not all social justice work takes the same form or has the same end goal in mind. When considering social justice education, I found a range of models, from those that simply aimed to help students survive within an unjust education system, to those that sought to help students achieve awareness of systemic inequality and find a sense of empowerment, to those that sought to prepare students to act directly against inequality and work towards systemic change. I found that art created in the name of social justice navigated a similar field. Social justice art included art that simply aimed to educate about injustice and art that hoped to inspire others to action and directly interrupt structures that contribute to systemic inequality. When considering charter schools driven by an arts-based education for social justice model, I found some that perpetuated systems of inequality. I became aware that some charter schools may provide a safe work space for students to learn about and work towards social justice but may not aim to deconstruct the oppressive education system itself. I also became aware of the possibility that charter schools with arts-based education for social justice models, if they stay true to the principles of this cause and the original ideals behind the charter model, may be able to lay the groundwork for an insurgency that starts from within the system and expands, leading to widespread reform and systemic change.

It was tempting to derive a spectrum from these questions, claiming that a true dedication to social justice must always result in an effort towards true equality and liberation. It was tempting to place those individuals with less radical goals on the lower end of a hierarchy and
condemn them for not committing fully to the cause. I will always be critical of those who deny the ways in which they are implicated within a system of power. I will be critical of those who view the oppression of others as a means to their own advancement. I will be critical of those who manipulate social justice movements in order to meet their own needs but have no real dedication to the cause. I remain committed to the ultimate goal of liberation and the reconstruction of our society into one that offers all individuals equal opportunity as human beings.

That being said, my experiences as a first generation woman of color at an elite institution, and my limited experiences working as a teacher trying to serve students from marginalized populations and transform education into a vehicle for social justice, I know that building the bridge between theory and practice is not a simple task. I know that this work is hard. I know that most of the weight of reforming the system falls on those who already carry the weight of oppression. I know that the need to survive within an oppressive system can sometimes force us into acceptance of life as it is. Sometimes conditions are so extreme that we are made to feel all we can hope for is survival. Sometimes we give up the more radical cause because it seems too abstract and it can be easier to rally support around more discrete, tangible goals. I have benefitted from these less radical movements, and in many ways, they have set the stepping stones on a path towards causing more radical breaks in the system. I would like to honor the work that others have done in the name of social justice in the past and the work that people are doing now. I hope that this thesis would resonate with anyone currently engaged in that work and that it would help them as they develop their own stance.
Works Cited

Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds.

ArtsEdSearch

Beyerbach, Barbara, and Deborah Davis, eds.

Bourdieu, Pierre

Darder, Antonia, Marta P. Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres, eds.

Delpit, Lisa

Dewhurst, Marit

Freire, Paulo

Gay, Geneva

Gillen, Jay, and Bob Moses

Ladson-Billings, Gloria
1995a But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Theory into Practice 34(3): 159-165.
Quinn, Therese, John Ploof, and Lisa Hochtritt, eds.  

Ravitch, Diane  

Scherff, Lisa, and Karen Spector, eds.  

Stone Hanley, Mary  

Stone Hanley, Mary, and Lee Anne Bell, eds.  

White, Terrenda  