Voices of Social Justice Activist Educators in Arizona

by

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ABSTRACT

The passing of anti-immigrant legislation in the state of Arizona over the last decade has exacerbated an already oppressive system perpetuated by globalization and its byproducts, neoliberalism and neoconservativism. The social justice activist educators who live and work with the children and families most affected by these laws and policies must learn to navigate these controls if they hope to sustain their work.

I have drawn from Freire's work surrounding the theories of praxis and conscientization to explain the motivation of these teachers, and the sociological theory of Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; & Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), to explain how the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice serves as a space of learning and support for these educators.

This dissertation is a multiple case study and has employed semi-structured interviews with four social justice activist educators to understand how social justice activist educators in Arizona cope and sustain their teaching and activism, particularly through their membership in groups such as Arizona Teachers for Justice.

The teachers in this study are each at different stages in their careers and each teaches in a different setting and/or grade level. This cross section provides multiple perspectives and varied lenses through which to view the struggles and triumphs of social justice activist educators in the state of Arizona. The teachers in this study share their experiences of being singled out for their activism and explain the ways they cope with such attacks. They explain how they manage to fulfill their dedication to equity by integrating critical materials while adhering to common core standards. They express the
anger that keeps them fighting in the streets and the fears that keep them from openly rejecting unjust policies.

The findings of this study contribute to the discussion of how to not only prepare social justice activist educators, but ways of supporting and sustaining their very crucial work. Neoliberal and neoconservative attacks on education are pervasive and it is critical that we prepare teachers to face these structural pressures if we hope to ever change the dehumanizing agenda of these global powers.
DEDICATION

To Mare Bear.

I wish you were still here so I could see your face and hear your sigh of relief when I tell you,

“‘My ‘paper’ is finally done.’”

To Moira

My hope for you is a world in which you will be valued for who you are, not for your test scores.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am overwhelmed with gratitude to the many people who have helped me reach this milestone. This journey has been wrought with challenges, but I am a stronger woman because of them, and if not for the challenges, I would never have been able to enjoy the sweet rewards.

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To the rest of my committee, Dr. Jennifer Sandlin and Dr. Daniel Schugurensky, I thank you for your expertise and support. Thank you for challenging me to look at my research from different angles and for being as excited about this work as I am.

I want to thank the teachers who participated in this study. Thank you for having the courage to share your stories. The work you do is so vital if we hope to change the climate of “reform” in which we work. Keep on fighting the good fight, and know that you always have an ally in me!

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conference calls. Your humor and love amidst the craziest and most painful moments of the last year has meant more to me than you will ever know.

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My dear family, those of you here, and those of you who are gone, every time I try to write the words to thank you for your love and support, they just feel too small to convey the fullness my heart has for you all. Thank you for taking my tearful phone calls and for trying to understand just what it was I’ve been doing the last five years. Thank you for cheering me on and for laughing at me when I needed to be laughed at, for laughing with me when I needed someone to laugh with, and for loving me no matter what.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning the Work: Globalization, Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo Freire: Consciousness and Praxis for Transformational Pedagogy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities of Practice</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary and Organization of the Dissertation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Social Justice Education and Who Are Social Justice Educators?</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Teacher Preparation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice + Activism: One Step Further</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing With the Pressures</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Systems as a Means to Sustain Social Justice Educators</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>............................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partcipants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sampling and Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple Case Study Methods: Explanation and Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection and Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parmeters of the Study and Potential Bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NEGOTIATING ARIZONA POLICY IN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE COMMUNITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet the Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of Political Climate on Teaching and Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arizona Teachers for Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of Political Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navigation of Policy and Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Solidarity: Arizona Teachers for Justice as a Community of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications and Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Research Directions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closing Statement ................................................................. 113

REFERENCES ........................................................................... 116

APPENDIX

A  INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL................................. 124

B  PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM ................................................ 126
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Nested Contexts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Breakdown of Relationship Between Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Neoconservativism</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Study Participants</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Triangulation Scheme</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Code List</td>
<td>54-55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

*Arizona is under attack. That may sound extreme or exaggerated, but for those of us in Arizona who believe in equity and justice for all Arizonans, there is no doubt we are under siege. (Fernández, 2010-2011, p. 49)*

This powerful quote from Anita Fernández, a professor of education at Prescott College in Arizona, illustrates the purpose of this study. A barrage of anti-immigrant and, some would say “white-washed,” legislation over the last decade has served to exacerbate relations in an already racially, culturally, economically, and linguistically divided state. This study is located at the heart of issues that social justice activist educators struggle with and how they are building communities of practice against great odds, such as limited time and resources, and increased attacks on the students and families with whom they work.

I moved to Arizona four years ago, a self-proclaimed social justice educator, to learn how to better advocate for more equitable and just education policies. I immediately recognized that teachers, particularly social justice educators like myself, had much more on their plates than their colleagues in other states. These anti-immigrant, anti-“other” laws impact the lives of Arizona’s social justice activist educators in profound ways. These teachers, who live and work with the children and families most affected by these laws and policies, must learn to navigate a whole new set of controls (book banning, elimination of culturally responsive programs and curricula and racist immigration laws) beyond those already set in place by globalization and its byproducts, neoliberalism and neoconservativism (standardization, high stakes testing, privatization of resources, etc.). This study seeks to place a lens on social justice activist educators who are working in the
state of Arizona in order to better understand 1) how they cope and 2) if and/or how they engage in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to sustain their teaching and activism in a state that provides often extreme systematic barriers to the enactment of survival mechanisms engaged by social justice activist educators in other states. The specific questions I sought to address are:

- How does the political climate of Arizona impact the teaching practice and political action of its activist teachers?
- How do social justice activist educators in Arizona navigate the political pressures employed by the state and local district policies?
- How does the organization, Arizona Teachers for Justice support its members’ teaching and activism?

This chapter will first provide the conceptual framing of this work, based on the current literature surrounding social justice teacher preparation and the coping mechanisms teachers employ to deal with external pressures placed upon them and their practice by globalization and neoliberal policies. Second, I will position this research in the grand realm of globalization in an effort to explain the political and economic structures that have lead to the current political landscape of Arizona and the pressures its teachers must face. Third, I will provide a theoretical framework in order to analyze the roles that social justice activist educators play within these structures. I draw from the work of Paulo Freire and connect his notions of banking education, conscientization and praxis to this study. Finally, I will suggest that communities of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998) provides the spaces and support these critical pedagogues need to engage in praxis so they may foster conscientization.
Conceptual Framework

First of all, I use the term social justice activist educator to refer to the teachers with whom I have worked throughout this study. Specifically, these are teachers who happen to engage in activism in both their classrooms and outside their school walls. They identify themselves as activists and are active in different grassroots organizations and participate in various political actions. This term is based on the literature surrounding the preparation and support of social justice educators and the notion of praxis, as described by Paulo Freire.

As chapter two will illustrate in more depth, teacher preparation programs that stress the importance of socially just pedagogy are crucial if we hope to accomplish educational reform that will address the glaring inequalities perpetuated by globalization and its related factors and forces. However, the literature states that socially just teachers cannot just learn the lingo or claim to foster conscientization (Freire, 1970/1986). They must be reflective, take the theories they learn in the classroom and make them real by engaging in activism. This working definition of praxis is illustrated below (Freire, 1970/1986).

![Figure 1. Praxis. This figure illustrates a working definition of praxis that will be central to this study.](image)

Figure 1. Praxis. This figure illustrates a working definition of praxis that will be central to this study.
Figure 2. Nested contexts. This figure illustrates the nested contexts of the study.

Figure 2 shows how social justice activist educators who belong to the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, are nested within various layers or contexts. As I will explain in depth, globalization, and its offspring, neoliberalism and neoconservativism, have created space for laws and practices, such as those in Arizona, that perpetuate inequalities that social justice activist educators work to expose (conscientization) and fight against (praxis). These policies, including high stakes testing, curricular standardization and market-driven competition, thrive on what Freire (1970/1986) referred to as banking concepts of education. Banking education relies on teachers depositing information into the minds of students, with little or no critical examination of systems of oppression. Social justice activist educators push against these structures and these acritical practices. This is not an easy task, and thus they must find ways to cope with these pressures. One tactic or strategy employed, as the literature will show, is the creation of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).
Positioning the Work: Globalization, Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism

Globalization is an umbrella term used to explain the interchange of ideas and resources across the globe and many domains (economic, cultural, and political) are impacted by this interchange. As new technologies allow for the flow of both information and goods, we find ourselves in a world in which “space and spatial markers cease to matter, at least to those whose actions can move with the speed of the electronic message” (Bauman, 1998, p. 13) Because of this “freedom” of movement, globalization has produced many outcomes. On one hand, thanks to globalization, we see the expansion of awareness of “human rights” and more organizations whose goals are to protect these rights (Burbules & Torres, 2000). People, at least those who have the economic means to do so, are exposed to much more information about other nations and cultures through travel or technological means, such as the Internet and cell phones. By encouraging this connectedness and seemingly borderless new reality, globalization has provided a truly dynamic and enriched experience for many. However, globalization has its oppressive side as well.

Because of this fluidity of movement, we see several elements that contribute to economic restructuring. Some of these elements include emerging common markets and trade agreements; a shift from the manufacturing of goods to the exchange of information and services; multinational corporate control over larger percentages of the world economy and trade; restructuring of the labor market and a relaxation of labor legislation; an increase of surplus workers; intensification of competition; and the de-skilling of large sections of the workforce which polarizes the labor market between a small group of high-paid, skilled workers and a large, low-paid and low-skilled group (Burbules &
Torres, 2000). All told, globalization is a complex set of dynamics and forces, all of which impact education policy in various ways.

**Neoliberalism.** Robertson condenses these elements into three central principles of neoliberalism: deregulation, competitiveness, and privatization (Robertson, 2008).

Deregulation refers to the removal of the state from a substantive role in the economy, except as guarantor of the free movement of capital and profits. Competitiveness is the justification for the dismantling of procedural state bureaucracies and range of welfare provisions that were built up in the postwar period. Privatization describes the sale of government businesses, agencies, or services to private owners, where accountability for efficiency is to profit-oriented shareholders. (Robertson, 2008, p. 15)

Neoliberalism, in many cases, also leads to the termination of major aspects of the welfare state and provision for basic human rights. Heron (2008) states, “Neoliberalism, as the supporting ideology of globalization, inflates the social significance of the market and mystifies human relations” (p. 85). In other words, according to David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a political/economic theory that claims progress and human well-being lies in the expansion of individual freedoms within a framework of strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. “If markets don’t exist…then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture” (Harvey, 2005, p.2). “Neoliberalism demands that freedom of the market, the right to free trade, the right to choose, and protection of private property be assured by the state” (Robertson, 2008, p. 13). Simply put, neoliberalism “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). And, just as the market is expected to
self-regulate through the ebb and flow of the free-market, neoliberalism commodifies humans and their endeavors in an effort to self-regulate (Robertson, 2008). Public services are pushed aside to make room for private enterprise, which ultimately weakens the state and public political participation (Sleeter, 2008). It further assumes that which is private is good and that which is public is bad (Apple, 1993 & 2000; Giroux, 2004; Compton & Weiner, 2008) and human endeavors are to be capitalized upon.

Within the discourse of neoliberalism, the notion of the public good is devalued and, where possible, eliminated as part of a wider rationale for a handful of private interests to control as much of social life as possible in order to maximize their personal profit. (Giroux, 2004)

Furthermore, as we become increasingly disengaged from our physical space, we begin to disengage with the “local” and the public good. Bauman (1998) explains, “…with public spaces removed beyond the reaches of localized life, localities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control” (p. 3).

As the nation-state is weakened, we see increased societal gaps. Ravitch (2007) states:

The survival of public education in our nation is intimately tied up with the survival of our democracy. We cannot privatize our schools and expect to improve the quality of our public life. The market will favor the “haves” not the “have-nots”. (p. 271)

Interestingly enough, however, in the late 1990’s neoliberalism started to shift its rhetoric to the improvement of social welfare and of advancing democracy. It began to “sell”
itself as the “antidote to social instability caused by social fragmentation civil conflict, and destabilization produced by migration, immigration, market volatility, and widespread economic and social exclusion” (Robertson, 2008, p. 18).

Neoconservativism. While neoliberalism relies on the notion of a deregulated and weakened nation-state, neoconservativism, on the other hand, is grounded in the belief in a strong nation-state; especially surrounding issues of knowledge, the body, gender, race, standards, conduct and values. According to Apple (1993, 1995, 1996, 2004), it is this ideological positioning that has led to a call for national curricula, national testing, higher standards, back to basics rhetoric, and savage patriotism (see Westheimer, 2007), although, any sense of a national responsibility for social good or the welfare state remains missing from these ideals. In other words, “the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the ‘ideal’ home, family, and school” (Apple, 1993, p. 227).

Organized systems of education operate under the aegis of a nation-state that controls, regulates, coordinates, mandates, finances, and certifies the process of teaching and learning…The question we face now is: To what extent is the educational endeavor affected by processes of globalization that are threatening the autonomy of national educational systems and the sovereignty of the nation-state as the ultimate ruler in democratic societies? (Burbles & Torres, 2000, p. 4)

Furthermore, and central to understanding the work social justice activist educators must face in Arizona, this rhetoric leads to attacks on bilingualism and multiculturalism/ethnic studies, as well as the denial of social benefits to the children of “illegal” and even
sometimes legal immigrants. These attacks are felt strongly in Arizona through the passing of English only laws (Arizona Proposition 203, 2000), the banning of Ethnic Studies (HB 2281) and anti-immigrant legislation (SB1070).

**Figure 3:** Breakdown of Relationship Between Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Neoconservativism

Neoliberalism and neoconservativism, thus, seem to be strange bedfellows, yet they have combined to create a very complex political landscape that teachers, as public workers, must navigate. The contradictory ideas of the nation state provided by neoliberalism (weak nation-state) and neoconservativism (strong nation-state) create a “perfect storm” of social problems; relaxed regulations for the wealthy, privatized education, and tighter controls for those at the margins lacking the economic or cultural capital to let the free market work its magic. Apple (1993) observes that one of the major effects of this combination of the market and an ideologically regulatory state is that education policy is taken out of public debate and placed into the hands of the individual
and the free market. Tensions therefore arise when we start to discuss the public’s beliefs about the purpose of public schooling. Is it a public good or a private commodity? Should it prepare children for active participation in civic society (Ponder, 1971; Dewey, 1916/1944) or is its purpose to create human capital and prepare children to be 21st century technicians, as those who adhere to structural functionalist perspectives believe (Zajda, Majhanovich & Rust, 2006; Eversman & Diaz, 2010).

According to Apple (1993),

No longer is education seen as part of a social alliance that combined many ‘minority’ groups, women, teachers, community activists, progressive legislators and government officials, and others who acted together to propose (limited) social democratic policies for schools (e.g., expanding educational opportunities, limited attempts at equalizing outcomes, developing social programs in bilingual and multicultural education and so on.). (p. 227)

These words, uttered in 1993, are just as relevant two decades later.

**Globalization’s impact on education.** Globalization, neoliberalism and neoconservativism all have a profound impact on education, the lives of teachers, and the power these teachers hold both inside and outside of the classroom. As the outcomes of globalization gain more and more ground in the realm of education, the work of teachers continues to be deprofessionalized (Sleeter, 2008) and villainized (See Kumashiro, 2012) through teacher bashing. These attacks certainly aren’t new to a historically feminized profession. In 1983, with the publication of A Nation at Risk, (The National Commission on Excellence in Education) Americans were bombarded by rhetoric that claimed their schools were not performing as well as their international peers and that the United States
was being overtaken by a “tide of mediocrity.” The claims made by this report were never substantiated (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), but the attacks continue, as do cries for higher test scores and higher standards. But what are the costs of these “accountability” measures?

Stan Karp, an editor for *Rethinking Schools* and veteran teacher, observed that the “teacher bashing” rampant in the United States explains that the extreme national policy debate is not just about teachers feeling this criticism, but more about “whether the right to a free public education for all children is going to survive as a fundamental democratic promise in our society” (Karp, 2011, p. 28). He explains that the narrative of failing public schools and finger pointing is endemic of a shift of the government’s role of “promoter of access and equity in public education” (p. 30) to one of corporate market ally; a role that continues to deepen already vast inequalities. Furthermore, he explains that schools are powerful sites where teachers and administrators can work with their students and members of their communities to promote social justice. Apple (1999) says it well when he explains,

> [W]hat may work for issues of administrative efficiency and budgets, may be much less effective in dealing with either meaningful teacher-student interaction or the utter complexity of classroom life. After all, our children are *not* plastic masses of raw material that can be ‘processed’ in the same way we make breakfast cereals.” (p. xvii)

**Arizona.** The teachers who participated in this study work in a world impacted by globalization. They are self-proclaimed social justice educators, who work to promote access and equity in the schools in which they work. They face attacks to their
professionalism by standardized and teacher proofed curricula. They face attacks to their time by high stakes tests and the preparation that such tests demand as well as other unreasonable strains placed on them by the powers that be. They are not much different, in this respect, from the teachers in all of the various studies done on retaining quality social justice educators (Kohl, 2002/2003; Angelides, Stylianou, & Leigh, 2007; Brill, & McCartney, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009; Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010; and Boyd, D., Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011) or exploring how teachers cope with all these demands (McNeil, 1988, 2000a, & 2000b; Nieto, 2003; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Jennings & De Matta, 2009; Picower, 2011; & Ritchie, 2012)

What sets them apart, however, is the fact that they work in the state of Arizona; a state, which, because of its geography and history presents a whole different set of demands.

On May 11, 2010, HB 2281 was signed into law by Arizona governor, Jan Brewer. Schools would lose 10% of their state funding if they should violate the law by including any courses or classes that:

• Promote the overthrow of the United States government.
• Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
• Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
• Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. (Arizona House Bill 2281, Retrieved from http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf)

The bill goes on to state that it does not restrict or prohibit:
Courses or classes for Native American pupils that are required to comply with federal law;

The grouping of pupils according to academic performance; including capability in the English language, that may result in a disparate impact by ethnicity;

Courses or classes that include the history of any ethnic group and that are open to all students, unless the course of class violates subsection A (see list above);

Courses or classes that include the discussion of controversial aspects of history; or

Instruction about the Holocaust, any other instance of genocide, or the historical oppression of a particular group of people based on ethnicity, race or class. (Arizona House Bill 2281, retrieved from http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf)

On December 30, 2010, Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne, declared the Mexican American Studies Department in the Tucson Unified School District to be out of compliance with HB 2281. The program was shut down by the Tucson Unified School District on January 10, 2012, and all the books and curricula used in the Mexican American Studies program were taken out of classrooms, boxed up and

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1 I find it important to point out that the Mexican American Studies Program was introduced to the Tucson Unified School District in 1997 as one of many responses to a 1974 racial bias lawsuit brought against the Tucson district by Hispanic and African American community members. Furthermore, in 2002, Augustine Romero was appointed as Director of the MAS program and given the charge, in response to No Child Left Behind, to close the Latino achievement gap in Arizona; a gap that the program did indeed help begin to rectify (Hesch, 2012 & Catone, 2012).
stored. The materials included books such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (1970/1986); *Chicano! The History of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement* by F. Arturo Rosales (1997); *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, edited by Elizabeth Martinez (1991); *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*, edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson (1998); Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) book, *Savage Inequalities*; and Howard Zinn’s (1980/2003), *A People’s History of the United States*. Despite attempts to repeal this legislation, in March of 2013, a federal judge ruled the law to be constitutional.

To make the situation even more disheartening, HB 2281 is only one of many government-sanctioned attacks on Arizona’s Mexican American population over the past decade. In 2000, bilingual education was outlawed with the passing of Proposition 203. This proposition, modeled after California’s Proposition 227, was funded by California businessman, Ron Unz, who supported similar legislation in California, Colorado and Massachusetts. It stated, “all children in Arizona public school shall be taught English as rapidly and effectively as possible.” (Wright, 2005 & Prop 203, retrieved from [http://www.azsos.gov/election/2000/info/pubpamphlet/english/prop203.htm](http://www.azsos.gov/election/2000/info/pubpamphlet/english/prop203.htm)) Without going into great depth, as this study is not about bilingual education in the state of Arizona, the crux of the problem with this legislation, is that is was vaguely worded and ultimately undermines the parents, teachers, and school administrators of children who are English Language Learners (ELLs). It is another example of neoconservative beliefs in a strong state that controls its citizens’ knowledge and values.

Finally, in the same spring session in which HB 2281 was passed, Governor Brewer signed one of the strictest anti-immigration laws in history: SB 1070. The wording of this law is so sweeping and vague that is ultimately authorizes police to use
racial profiling during lawful stops to detain those they deem potentially undocumented. This law also criminalizes documented citizens for assisting any undocumented citizens with simple tasks, such as car rides (Gutiérrez, Hanhardt, Joseph, Licona, & Soto, 2010/2011; Fernández, 2010/2011; SB 1070 retrieved from http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf). In June of 2012, the Supreme Court struck down three major provisions of the bill, but not the most contentious portion of the law; the “show me your papers” provision. This ruling meant that law enforcement officers could no longer arrest people on minor immigration charges, but they could still require people to show documentation of their citizenship if stopped for any suspected crime. This provision continues to allow for racial profiling and other rights abuses.

Many other such policies and laws exist in the state of Arizona, but I have focused on these three because my participants talk primarily about these three events when asked about how Arizona politics and policies impact their activism and teaching.

**Paulo Freire: Consciousness and Praxis for Transformational Pedagogy**

Education for social justice needs to move beyond functionalist and vocationalist-oriented perspectives of schooling (which stress education for jobs) to one where the traditional model of schooling becomes a transformational pedagogy. (Zajda, Majhanovich & Rust, 2006, p. 10)

In an attempt to problematize these functionalist notions set forth by globalization, I choose to call on the work of Paulo Freire. His work will provide a theoretical framework through which we can understand 1) the political nature of education and 2) the need for social justice activist educators working in a system
increasingly dependent on what Freire called, “a banking model of education” (Freire, 1970/1986).

**Banking.** The first of several central ideas behind Freire’s theories regarding critical education is that of banking education. The banking model of education is that in which students are thought of as empty vessels into which teachers pour or deposit knowledge. Students are passive recipients, or objects that are acted upon, rather than subjects who are actively engaged with the world in which they live.

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness. Thus the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior. (Freire, 1970/1986, p. 47)

This model is certainly favored by globalization. As more and more mandates come down from on high, the time teachers have to engage in discussion and critical examination shrinks. Furthermore, as testing companies continue to sell their testing prep curricula, teachers are increasingly forced to stick to the script and “pour” knowledge into their students’ minds (See McNeil, 2000a & 2000b). Teachers themselves, in this market based, neoliberal and neoconservative setting, are also seen as empty vessels, into which textbook companies, testing companies, and administrators focused on raising test scores pour testing strategies and mandated curricula.

This model, according to Freire (1970/1986; 1974/2007; 1996; 1998) dehumanizes both the teacher and the student. He calls for education that is more grounded in the real world, in the learners’ and teachers’ lived experiences because, “The
capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors…” (Freire, 1970/1986, p. 73). I argue that social justice activist educators are those who do not blindly accept this learning model. I hope to show that the teachers in this study engage in critical pedagogies that challenge this model; pedagogies that seek to respect the humanness of their students and their selves by facilitating the development of critical consciousness, or conscientization. Furthermore, I believe it is the dehumanizing nature of prescriptive methods that fuels their frustration and activism and either keeps them fighting, or burns them out.

**Conscientization.** The next notion used by Freire that is critical to this study is that of conscientization (or conscientização or critical consciousness). Conscientization is the act of coming to an understanding of one’s oppressors—both human and structural. Freire believed that freedom begins once one recognizes the systems of oppression in which he or she exists. He stated, “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1970/1986, p. 47).

Underlying true socially just/activist/critically grounded pedagogy is the understanding that people are not passive.

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’. Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors’ purposes: hence their
utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student conscientização. (Freire, 1970.1986, p. 74)

Furthermore, socially just/activist/critically grounded pedagogy, in the Freirean sense, recognizes that education is not politically neutral. To believe otherwise is to maintain the oppressiveness of the dominant paradigm.

The dominant class, deaf to the need for a critical reading of the world, insists on the purely technical training of the working class, training with which that class should reproduce itself as such. Progressive ideology, however, cannot separate technical training from political preparation, just as it cannot separate the practice of reading the world from reading discourse. From the dominant point of view, the more we proclaim the lie that educational practice is neutral in the provision of service, the more we can diminish resistance to this lie, and the easier we can achieve dominant goals. (Freire, 1996, p. 83)

Opponents of this critical consciousness claim that such awareness will lead people to “destructive fanaticism” (Freire, 1970/1986). Certainly, consciousness assists in the alteration of the status quo by bringing it into question, but Freire believed it has the opposite effect. When people, as responsible subjects, armed with critical consciousness, act upon their worlds, they engage in self-affirmation. This, Freire believed, helps us avoid fanaticism. Freire tells us that this is most certainly a job for radicals who are committed to human liberation. Again, teachers in Arizona have their work cut out for them since they teach in a state where the dominant discourse is one that seeks to homogenize the richness and diversity of its people.
The values that the Huppenthals and Hornes\(^2\) of Arizona want students to embrace hark back to those of Horatio Alger: through individual determination, hard work, and honesty, you will rise in the fundamentally just, colorblind system of capitalism-i.e., ‘the land of opportunity’. (Bigelow, 2012, p. 29)

The importance of conscientization in relation to this study is twofold. On one hand, as previously mentioned, true socially just education is grounded in the notion that people are not simply objects to be acted upon or passive recipients of regimes of power. Social justice activist educators understand this and work to create learning spaces in which their students can grapple with the layers of oppression they face. In Arizona, where anti-immigration laws and policies demand standardization of culture and language, teachers and students must navigate an even more oppressive world. On the other hand, when we shift the focus from the student to the teacher, we see that on top of the neoconservative cries for cultural and linguistic homogenization, teachers must deal with increasing deprofessionalization and villainization brought about by neoliberalism and its reliance on the market. (See Kumashiro, 2012; McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b)

Chapters four and five illustrate how the teachers in this study recognize these oppressive structures and how this consciousness leads them to actively work to alter the status quo.

Praxis. Of the three tenets of Freire’s work I have chosen for this study, I believe praxis is the most important because first of all, I believe, as Freire says, “To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (Freire, 1970/1986, p. 50). Second, I believe

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\(^2\) John Huppenthal is the current Arizona Superintendent of Public Schools. He took over the position from Tom Horne and continued the work Horne started that culminated in the termination of the Mexican American Studies Program in the Tucson Unified School District.
the teachers in this study recognize the crucial role reflection and action play in their social justice work. Finally, I see praxis as the unifying action that fuses all the layers of the struggle. “Critical thinking is not enough. One must act on those reflections and “be willing and able to act to change that world” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 52).

Praxis is the marriage of theory, reflection, and action upon the word so that we may transform it (Freire, 1970/1986). In other words, to put it simply, it is the word plus work. Freire (1985) tells us that words without action is verbalism and action without reflection is mere activism. “Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply ‘blah, blah, blah,’ and practice pure activism” (Freire,1998, p. 30). This is why I call the teachers in this study social justice activist educators. These teachers don’t merely speak, they act and they don’t merely act, they reflect as well.

Praxis is a crucial requisite to conscientization. Without reflection and action, one cannot become aware of the structures of oppression or hope to alter these structures. People will be truly critical if they live the plenitude of the praxis, that is, if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, on which enables them to perceive the causes of reality. (Freire, 1970/1986, p. 131)

Furthermore:

Critical pedagogy would never find it sufficient to reform the habits of thought of thinkers, however effectively, without challenging and transforming the institutions, ideologies, and relations that engender distorted, oppressed thinking
in the first place-not as an additional act beyond the pedagogical one, but as an inseparable part of it. (Burbules & Berk, in Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999, p. 52)

The dominant theme in this study relates to the notion of praxis in that it seeks to understand how social justice activist educators in the state of Arizona work to combine their awareness of structural oppression, in the form of anti-immigrant policies, with their activism to reflect on how these forces and actions serve to alter not only their realities, but those of their students as well. Because, as Maxine Greene states,

To teach for social justice is to teach for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise. It is to find models in literature and in history of the indignant ones who have taken the side of the victims of pestilences, whatever their names or places of origin. It is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds. (Greene, 1998, xlv)

Communities of Practice

As previously noted, Freire demands we recognize that humans are active agents who engage in the world in community with others. In order to understand how social justice activist educators can best sustain the critical work they carry out within structures and philosophies so antithetical to their own, I call on the sociocultural theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; & Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). This theory is useful in that it connects the shared practices, collective meaning making and identities of teachers so we can better
understand how their participation in such groups can support their teaching and activism.

According to Wenger, McDermontt, & Snyder (2002), “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). The people who belong to a CoP do not necessarily work together on a daily basis, but as they spend time together they help each other solve problems and collectively make meaning of the project in which they are engaged. Their bond comes from learning together and knowing colleagues who share similar ideas, problems, and perspectives and they develop a feeling of a common mission and identity.

Wenger and his colleagues have based their work surrounding CoP on several key points about the nature of knowing. First, for Wenger, knowledge is “inseparable from practice and it is integrated into the life of the community of practice where members share values, beliefs, language and the way they do things” (Angelides, Stylianou & Leigh, 2007, p. 139). (See also Lave & Wenger, 1991) Knowledge, then, to Wenger is social as well as individual, dynamic, and tacit as well as explicit (Wenger, et al., 2002).

Communities of practice are formal and informal, long-lived or short-lived, small or big, spontaneous or intentional (Wenger, et al, 2002). We all belong to one or more of such groups, but not all “communities” are communities of practice. Wenger explains there are three essential characteristics that must be present to have a CoP: domain, community and practice (Wenger, et al., 2002, p. 45-46). The domain is comprised of the topics and issues the group collectively agrees to and that feed the passions of the CoP’s members. The community refers to the structural issues the group must work out, such as
roles people will play, how often and where the group will meet, how will new members be admitted, and what kind of activities will bind members in trust. And finally, practice refers to how the group will “become an effective knowledge resource to its members and to other constituents that may benefit from its expertise” (Wenger, et al. 2000, p. 46).

(See also Wenger, 1998)

Wenger and his colleagues (2002) also discuss the different motivations of those who choose to join CoP.

Some people participate because they care about the domain and want to see it developed. Others are drawn by the value of having a community…Other members simply want to learn about the practice…what tools work well, what lessons have been learned by master practitioners. The community is an opportunity to learn new techniques and approaches in their personal desire to perfect their craft. (p. 44)

As chapter five will illustrate, Arizona Teachers for Justice is a CoP because its members truly believe in the CoP’s domain of social justice activist education and want to learn from one another and find ways to be more effective and hopeful activist educators.

**Summary and Organization of the Dissertation**

Globalization and its byproducts, neoliberalism and neoconservativism, have created a complex and potentially daunting environment in which teachers must work. Social justice activist educators must deal with even more pressures because globalization has helped intensify cultural and economic inequalities that they work so diligently to critique and alter. This study seeks to understand how these critical
educators work within the constraints cultivated by globalization and a rapid narrowing of their educational degrees of freedom by viewing their work through a Freirean lens; a lens that critically examines the banking modes of education so favored by neoliberalism and neoconservativism. By understanding the concepts of conscientization and praxis we can understand the work social justice activist educators have before them and how they work to make these critical examinations real by engaging in reflection and action. This work, I propose, is accomplished most effectively, when social justice activist educators engage with like-minded colleagues in communities of practice. It is in these communities that social justice activist educators can find support through shared practices, collective meaning making and identity development.

Chapter two explores the literature surrounding the preparation and support of social justice educators in greater depth. I illustrate how Freire’s ideas surrounding conscientization and praxis come out in this literature. I also demonstrate how the literature supports the creation and nurturing of Communities of Practice as spaces of support for social justice activist educators. Through this examination, I seek to point out gaps in the literature that my study attempts to address. I hope to extend the work on these topics so that social justice activist educators can find the supports they need; support when the systems in which they work often do not provide.

In chapter three, I present the design and methodology that was used in this study. I describe my participants, the Community of Practice in which they work, and provide my sampling strategy and rationale. I also provide the questions used in the semi-structured interviews and the codes used to organize and analyze the data. I also address modes of triangulation used to assure validation of the data used in this study.
Chapter four will elucidate how the participants in this study navigate Arizona policy in their classrooms through either resistance, camouflaging, or by leaving the profession all together. I share their stories of how they substitute alternative materials and/or integrate social justice themes in their classrooms. I also talk about how some participants work to keep their teacher selves separate from their activist selves in an effort to stay below the radar of unsupportive colleagues and administrators. I share the stories of how these teachers use the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice to support their work and their struggles. This chapter will give a history of the group and talk about how it has evolved and continues to evolve, as politics and policies in the state of Arizona change. Members will talk about how the group has helped, or if it has helped, them develop as both teachers and as activists.

Finally, chapter five provides a summary of the findings as well as a discussion about the implications of this work and offer suggestions for further study. I offer my own reflections about this work and talk about how my own teacher and activist self has been impacted by the work of the Arizona Teachers for Justice.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As chapter one has described, the powers of globalization, neoliberalism and neoconservativism are ubiquitous and teachers who are dedicated to social justice activism face both daily challenges and longer term struggles in their praxis. The purpose of this literature review is to examine scholarship that addresses three realms related to this work. First, it will examine why and how social justice activist educators are prepared to enter the globalized classroom. Second, it will look at literature surrounding the mechanisms employed by these teachers. Finally, it will examine one of these coping mechanisms in greater depth; namely, the use of support systems as means to sustaining social justice activist educators as communities of practice.

The outcomes of globalization, including the increasing pressures of high stakes standardized testing, unjust accountability measures, narrowing curricular focus on “master scripts” and dwindling resources, are all helping to push teachers out of the profession. Even more problematic, is that studies show that most of the teachers who are leaving tend to be precisely the kinds of teachers whose retention can make an impact in high need settings; idealistic and critical of the larger inequitable structures that are tightening their grasp on educational policies (Meich & Elder, 1996). Nathan Eklund (2009) says it well, stating, “In fact, our better days are ahead if we can align policies and practices to reflect the reasons teachers were drawn to education in the first place” (p. 26). Such policies would allow teachers to bring their best knowledge into their classrooms (McNeil, 2000a & 2000b) and spend their time engaging with students
instead of teaching from prescribed and generic curricula “divorced from their children’s varied experiences and devoid of a basis in child development” (McNeil, 2000a, p. xxiv).

**What is Social Justice Education and Who Are Social Justice Educators?**

We must operate within an overarching truth: public systems of education are increasingly threatened by moves toward privatization, and often serve as assembly lines for the status quo…However, we are faced with a parallel reality: if we do not continue and strengthen our efforts to critique, understand, and create new systems by which to educate young people, we will continue to drown in defeat and the powerful will continue to argue for the destruction of our ability to dream and move on those dreams. This is what social justice education offers.

(Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall; 2009; xiv)

Definitions of social justice and social justice education are abundant, yet ambiguous. Zajda Majhanovich & Rust (2006) suggest that, “Most conceptions of social justice refer to an egalitarian society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being” (p. 10). While some of the earliest concepts of social justice can be traced back to the writings of Plato, in the *Republic*, and St. Thomas Aquinas, in his work, *Summa Theologica*, the first appearance of the term, “social justice” was found in the 1840 writing of Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, a Sicilian priest (Zajda, Majhanovich & Rust, 2006). Our modern perceptions of social justice, however, are grounded in the work of John Rawls' theories of distributive justice, as explicated in his work, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). He states,
Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason, justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore, in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 3-4)

While this is certainly a workable definition of social justice, it is still problematic in that it rests on assumptions of equality as opposed to equity. Maxine Greene offers a critique of this tradition of reasoning, in that “little attention is given to the economic circumstances that prevent so many from even entering the discussion about principle or from designing life plans they believe they can realize” (Greene, 1998, xxvi). To clarify, equality, in very simplistic terms, means that everyone gets exactly the same. Equity, on the other hand, means that each receives the same quality of outcome. Because the reality of our society is that many are excluded from the start, equality can never truly be achieved and seeking to distribute justice in such a way is simply unrealistic.

Greene’s (1998) critique is especially relevant when positioning social justice and social justice education within the limitations set forth by neoliberalism and neoconservativism. We must realize that claims for equality (as opposed to equity) under a distributive model of justice, or one that seeks equal justice for all, just doesn’t address the realities of this globalized world that favors the private sector ahead of the public and is increasingly polarized between the wealthy and the poor. Indeed, those who argue for
standardization and equal treatment when standardization and equal treatment are just not enough, could call on this theory of distributive justice to justify the homogenization of people, their cultures and their languages. This is, I believe, particularly problematic in the state of Arizona. Furthermore, social justice educators, teaching in this globalized society, “teach in a world where freedom is defined by individual liberties over the common good and opportunity is prioritized over access” (Eversman & Diaz, 2010, p. 60). Because of this reality, social justice educators who position their work both in the classroom and out, upon the three pillars of equity, activism, and social literacy (Ayers, Quinn & Stovall, 2009) have their work cut out for them.

These are all important concepts to consider when thinking about the development and support of social justice educators. There are myriad studies in which researchers try understand how teachers deal with these pressures either through acts of resistance or by altering their practice (Goodson, 1992; McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b; Picower, 2011). Studies abound in which researchers lament teacher attrition and try to understand how to retain quality teachers (Nieto, 2003; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Eklund, 2009; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009; Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). These studies speak of creating professional development opportunities, encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles, and building networks of support inside and outside the school walls. Scholars have also spent much energy exploring how teacher preparation programs should prepare socially just teachers so they will be ready to face a system that is rife with inequality and the inevitable structural stresses they will face in an attempt to nip the retention problem in the bud (See

There is little scholarship, however, which addresses the intersection of all these issues; specifically the lives of social justice activist educators who have made it into the classroom and push ahead despite the pressures and inequalities afforded by globalization. The following sections will provide a short overview of the research literature surrounding three areas: (1) social justice and activist educator preparation, (2) teachers’ coping mechanisms, and (3) networks of like-minded educators as a means to support and sustain said social justice activist educators.

Social Justice Teacher Preparation

“As educators we are politicians; we engage in politics when we educate, and if we dream about democracy, let us fight, day and night.” (Freire, 1998, p.68)

In the same way neoconservatives and neoliberals are divided about the role of the state in economic and educational realms and political theorists are divided about definitions of social justice, the role of schooling has conflicting expectations as well. Those who believe the public school’s mission is to help foster democratic ideals of inquiry, discussion and social reform and that the teacher’s role is to be an agent of change (Dewey, 1916/1944, 1927/1954, & 1938/1997; Counts, 1932/1959; Freire, 1970/1986; Shor & Freire, 1987; hooks, 1994 & 2003; Wolk, 1998; Ayers, 2004; Michelli & Keiser, 2005; Rury, 2005; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Jenlink, 2009) tend to identify social justice education as those curricula and methods that will “honor students’ languages, cultures, foster appreciation of difference and engage in a moral use of power that resists discrimination and inequity” (Williamson, Rhodes, & Dunson, 2007,
Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu (2010) offer an excellent, all-encompassing definition of teaching for social justice:

Educators who teach for social justice (a) enact curricula that integrate multiple perspectives, question dominant Western narratives, and are inclusive of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in North America; (b) support students to develop a critical consciousness of the injustices that characterize our society and (c) scaffold opportunities for students to be active participants in a democracy, skilled in forms of civic engagement and deliberative discussion. (p. 238)

It is this definition that dominates the literature on social justice education, the definition with which I personally identify, and the one most appropriate for this study.

Keeping these tensions in mind, we must understand that many debates about teacher preparation rest on the varied ideologies surrounding the purpose of schooling, the same way definitions of social justice do. Apple (2010) states, “Understanding education requires that we situate it in the unequal relations of power in the larger society and in the realities of dominance and subordination-and the conflicts-that are generated by these relations” (p. 152). He provides a litany of questions social justice educators and those who are involved in the preparation and nurturing of social justice educators must ask:

Whose knowledge is this? How did it become “official”? What is the relationship between this knowledge and the ways in which it is taught and evaluated, and who has cultural, social, and economic capital in this society? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and from the ways schooling and this society are organized, and who does not? How do what are usually seen as
“reforms” actually work? What can we do as critical educators, researchers, and activists to change existing educational and social inequalities and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just? (Apple, 2010, p. 152)

These questions are echoed by many other critical scholars and are the questions that permeate teacher preparation programs that are dedicated to attracting, forming, and sustaining social justice educators (e.g. the TEP at UCLA\(^3\)). This is important work, since, as Beatrice Fennimore (2008) asserts:

> As long as so many American children live in poverty, are victims of inequality, lack health care, suffer violence, and are exploited as consumers of unhealthful foods and damaging media images, every educator will need to place her or his work in the context of commitment to greater social justice. (p. 3)

**Social Justice + Activism: One Step Further**

Sleeter (1992), Cochran-Smith (2008), Sachs (2000 & 2003), Kohl (2002/2003) and Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman (2002) all suggest that learning specific techniques or practices are not enough to sustain a theory of social justice pedagogy. An element of activism must be added in order to bridge the gaps between theory and practice: praxis. Praxis is the notion of actively engaging with theory so that said theory may be practiced and realized in the “real world”. In her book, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt speaks of action as crucial to the full development of a society that honors the uniqueness of all members of its citizenry (Arendt, 1958/1998).

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\(^3\) The TEP is the teacher preparation program at UCLA’s Center X. It “prepares aspiring teachers to become social justice educators in urban settings. To serve a wide range of aspiring and accomplished educators, TEP offers several pathways that culminate in a Teaching Credential and/or Master of Education degree.” (http://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/teacher-education/)
Paulo Freire, too, speaks of praxis as a tool by which those who are oppressed may gain consciousness and work as agents of change (Freire, 1970/1986). Taking these notions into consideration, we can begin to understand the need for the marriage of social justice education and activism and invite “consideration of teacher ‘activism’ as appropriate and necessary for educational transformation that supports a social justice agenda” (Collay, 2010, p. 222) because “there is an assault on the very enterprise of public education” (Kohl, 2002/2003, p. 5).

In her study about social justice teachers’ survival strategies, Picower (2011) explains that, even though the teachers in her study were able to develop coping mechanisms (which will be described more in depth shortly) that allowed them to function within the pressures of “educational mandates antithetical to their classroom goals” (p. 1107), they were not able to attack the larger neo-liberal agenda and thus make more impactful, system wide changes. Sleeter (1992) similarly found that teachers in her intercultural education course shifted their beliefs about equity and justice, but were unable to transfer these beliefs to their classroom practice. In a sense, these mechanisms simply help to maintain; they do little to transform the broader neoliberal agenda. In Picower’s words, “You can decorate a jail cell, but you still aren’t free” (p. 1130).

Anita Fernández tells about her work in Arizona as professor in a teacher preparation program and how she encourages her students to be not only teachers but activists as well because,

> Teachers have a responsibility to not only have a deep and informed understanding of active pedagogy, best practices, educational psychology, and
curriculum design, but also must be steeped in resistance, politics and organizing. (Fernández, 2010/2011, p. 51)

In this way, future teachers learn to do what is right for their students, their selves, the schools, their communities, and their world. In a 1971 article, Gerald Ponder wrote that teachers must not avoid the political role of schooling. They must embrace their role as transmitter of social and political values and engage in activist roles so they may more authentically model and assist young people in developing their political citizen selves. He goes on to say, “Teachers must become politically active…Interaction between the classroom and society outside must increase…and activism should be considered as a means of increasing teacher effectiveness” (Ponder, 1971, p. 366).

Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, and Stillman (2002) and Weiler and Maher (2002) contend that if we are to create and nurture teacher activists, programs must allow for activist experiences that allow “teachers to acquire the skills, disposition, and political consciousness necessary to engage in social and political action” (Montaño, et al., 2002, p. 265). By adding this element of activism to teacher preparation programs, future teachers learn how to recognize the larger forces that are at work and gain not only more tools with which to navigate the realities of current school policies but also activist skills so they can go out to fight for their students and their profession (Sachs, 2000 & 2003).

Moreover, progressive programs educating prospective teachers need to include both models of progressive pedagogy and curriculum and courses exploring the historical and contemporary politics of education, to give prospective teachers tools of analysis and action. (Maher & Weiler, 2002/2003, p. 2)
If the goal is eliciting social change, teachers who have never engaged in activism are not going to be effective in training their students to engage in social change. And, as Fernández (2010-2011) says:

Activist teaching is fed by the hope that when we act on our world in order to change it, our youth will emulate that activism and never lose faith that their actions make a difference in their community and in the world. In Paulo Freire’s words, ‘It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite.’ (p. 52)

It is also important to think of teacher activism and the role it plays in fostering social change in another way. In their study of activist women educators working in post-authoritarian Brazil, Jennings, and Da Matta (2009) explain that these women’s activist selves helped form their teacher selves and the development of socially just counter-pedagogies. The past experiences of these women helped them to view education as political and activism as a crucial element to the development of socially just practice. Similarly, Collay (2010) speaks of how social justice activist educators’ teacher selves are fostered and supported through reflection on past experiences of marginalization and injustice. Collay (2010) suggests, “instead of pushing non-mainstream teachers, who are activist-leaders, toward conventional leadership roles or out of the profession, they can be designated as the true leaders they are…” (p. 231).

**Dealing with the Pressures**

Teaching in a structural-functionalist context only allows a teacher to teach *about* social justice. The actual practice of teaching *for* social justice

As I show in future chapters, almost all of the teachers who participated in this study alluded to just how difficult teaching for social justice is. They recognize and experience, daily, that teaching is not a neutral endeavor and social justice education is even more political and socially engaged. As Sal Castro (2010/2011) stated in an interview with Gilda L. Ochoa in the Winter 2010/2011 issue of *Rethinking Schools*, “You start with the love of the kids, not the love of your subject matter. You start loving the kids and know that you’re going to go to the wall for them to make sure they’re successful” (p. 43).

Several of the participants made such comments and this, I would argue, is what sets social justice activist educators apart from other teachers, and what makes them particularly vulnerable to the pressures placed upon them. “Many social justice educators are, in fact, teacher activists in political and social movements working to bring about changes in educational policies that they perceive to be unjust” (Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, 2002, p. 265). Herbert Kohl (2002/2003) proclaims that any radical teacher education program “has to consider the tension between developing critical, perceptive, skilled, and motivated new activist teachers and the grim realities and struggles they will likely face” (p. 5) and prepare these teachers “to be working against the grain and be willing to see themselves as agents of change” (p. 5).

Social justice educators often find themselves in systems that perpetuate and widen the equality gaps they hoped to help narrow and eliminate. This is often the cause of great consternation.
These are teachers who enter the profession with the hopes of ‘making a difference’ and contributing to positive change in society. However, the constraints they face within public schools make it difficult for them to realize their idealism, leading to frustration, a lack of efficacy, and attrition. (Picower, 2011, 1130)

In her editorial, *Educators Who Tell The Truth*, Beatrice Fennimore reflects on how teachers who are dedicated to social justice often face discouragement, frustration and failure. She declares, “Educators in any setting who tell the truth about the ways their workplaces need to improve in quality and equal opportunity for students must realistically anticipate “mixed reviews” (Fennimore, 2008, p. 3).

Social justice educators must find ways to function within these controls and deal with these “mixed reviews.” The scholarship surrounding this topic has found that teachers engage in several different coping strategies, including but not limited to, camouflaging (McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011), openly rejecting policies (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011), and creating teacher networks of like minded colleagues that become safe havens for their critical work (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011).

Camouflaging refers to the practice of keeping ones’ critical practices out of the view of others. Sonu (2012) also refers to this as “performing the public transcript of neoliberal school culture” (p. 241). This is done in a few different ways, but the “safest” way teachers carry this out is by substituting alternative materials and integrating themes
of inequality and injustice into the mandated curriculum. In this way, teachers can show they are “following the rules” by sticking to the standards, but they are still able to engage students in critical inquiry about the topics presented by the mandated curriculum. This is certainly a useful tactic, but teachers in Arizona must be more creative with their camouflaging, since state laws prohibit the use of many critical and culturally relevant materials, such as the books *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years* (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970/1986), *A People’s History of the United States: 1492 to Present* (Zinn, 1980/2003), and *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Rosales, 1997).

Teachers who openly reject polices are at the greatest risk of attracting negative attention, alienating colleagues, and losing their jobs. With teachers’ pay and job security being increasingly linked to student test scores and other neoliberal machinations, this risk has become even greater. This tactic entails direct dissent and teaching critically out in the open. Narratives abound (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011 to name only a few) in which teachers have chosen to be “loud and proud” about their dissent. Some of them are lucky enough to work in settings where this is supported while others find themselves being pushed out of the classroom and in some cases, education all together (See Montaño & Burstein, 2006). In an article in *Rethinking Schools*, Melissa Bollow Tempel (Summer 2010) tells about a particular instance where she sought to challenge her school’s policies of forcing her students into test-prep classes and taking away their electives. When she decided to “go it alone” she was met with great resistance and made many enemies at her school. She
speaks about how her path would have been much easier had she taken the time to build allies with her fellow teachers.

**Support Systems as a Means to Sustain Social Justice Activist Educators**

“*Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act.*” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 188)

Sonia Nieto writes much about how a teacher’s values, dispositions, beliefs and experiences all help to maintain his or her determination to remain in the classroom. Engaging intellectual work, love, hopefulness, the belief in the potential of public education to help create a more democratic society, a sense of mission and solidarity, and the courage to challenge the status quo are all also important motivators for teachers to enter into and remain in the teaching profession (Neito, 2003 and 2005). Nieto makes clear that the best way to keep social justice teachers from leaving the profession, schools and districts must allow teachers to build partnerships and teachers must learn to find allies (Nieto, 2009).

Echoing this sentiment, Nathan Eklund (2009) talks about teaching as a service profession and asserts that teachers tend to view their work as a calling. This sense of calling certainly helps educators persist when times get tough, but it is the same sense of service that can lead to burnout. In his article, *Sustainable Workplaces, Retainable Teachers*, he calls for attention to collegiality through supportive groups of like-minded teachers as a means to support and retain dedicated teachers. These support systems also serve as sites in which activist teachers engage in praxis; putting their ideologies into action.
In Picower’s 2011 study, the teachers who were members of a social justice critical inquiry project speak of the “mixed reviews” previously mentioned by Fennimore (2008). The members of this group often spoke of how they craved the support and approval of their peers, but because of their political ideologies and commitments to issues of inequality, they were often alienated. The CIP (Critical Inquiry Project) group served as a safe haven and a “respite where they received reinforcement, solidarity, healthy competition, and a sense that they were a part of something bigger” (Picower, 2011, p. 1118). In other words, it became a place where the teachers could find the approval they so desperately craved from their coworkers and find the support they needed to enact their critical pedagogy. “Rather than buying into the nagging sense that they were crazy radicals who were alienated at their schools, they began to understand that they were part of something bigger, a professional movement of caring and committed educators” (Picower, 2011, p. 1122). Kohl (2002/2003) states:

Teaching under this kind of stress, and acting to create situations that are free of teacher proof programs, cynical and racist prohibitions that suppress students’ home languages and culture, and institutional resentment of students who are considered failures, is difficult for the experienced teacher. Without peer support, a strong will, and clear convictions, as well as a large bag of tricks, thoughtful pedagogy, and an abiding love for children, a young teacher can hardly survive. (p. 10)

In a similar study by Quartz and the TEP research group (2003), teachers speak of how, despite frustrating conditions, they are buoyed by the daily support of allies in their buildings and by the camaraderie they find during their monthly discussions with fellow
Teacher Education Program (TEP) members. Teachers need to find people who can help them deal with external controls and mandates that place pressure on their teaching ideologies. Luckily, many such teacher activist groups are emerging across the country. Some of these groups include the New York Collective of Radical Educators, Teachers for Social Justice (Chicago), Teachers 4 Social Justice (San Francisco), and Arizona Teachers for Justice.

Montaño and Burstein (2006) offer a counter example of how support systems of like-minded teacher activists don’t always keep teachers in the classroom. In their study on Chicana teachers and how their support groups helped sustain them, the participants in this study felt “having colleagues or peers who shared the same teaching philosophy was the most important connection” (p. 178). However, the teachers in this group still left teaching and only one of the twelve participants was still active in community activism. As one heading in this paper declares, “Informal Social Networks Sustain But Will Not Retain” (p. 182). The reasoning behind this is that teachers in this study simply felt they had no power to change the system even though they received a social justice based teacher training and were also a part of a group in which they learned “to raise their voices, struggling to develop their bicultural voice and embracing critical consciousness as biculturally affirmed Chicanas” (Montaño and Burstein, 2006, p. 173). This study points out a gap in the literature surrounding the support of activist teachers; the consideration of socialization and the impact of a teacher’s past experiences, identity, and ideologies. This is a gap I am hoping to fill with this research endeavor.

Networking is not only useful in sustaining teachers, but also in helping them in the development of critical practices (Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, &
Stillman, 2002 & Angelides, Stylianou, & Leigh, 2007). When teachers are allowed and encouraged to exchange ideas and dialogue about the inherent struggles of teaching critically, they are able to learn from each other and not only find strength and solidarity, they can hone their craft as well. “Participation in these organizations, then, invoked a critical analysis of relevant issues as well as a concern for their more complex dimensions. In addition, these skills facilitated teachers’ intentions to help their students develop similar critical abilities” (Montaño, et al., 2002, p. 269). Furthermore, “it was evident that the political work of teacher activists in these communities of practice helped them to think more constructively about their philosophical, theoretical, and practical orientations in their classrooms” (Montaño, et al., 2002, 271).

I also want to point out that networks such as these discussed above, take many different forms. In his article, Incubating and Sustaining: How Teacher Networks Enable and Support Social Justice Education, Scott Ritchie (2012) provides readers with snapshots of two main types of networks: justice oriented teacher networks and social justice networks that function outside of the realm of education. It is within the former of these two types of networks in which I situate my work. Justice oriented teacher networks encompass the types of groups described in the literature above. They are defined by their informality and composition, solely, of teachers who gather to “collaborate to prevent isolation, offer emotional support, and share teaching ideas around social justice themes” (Ritchie, 2012). The reason for this focus lies merely in the fact that I want to focus, at this time, on the support activist teachers provide for one another and not on the supports of external groups not rooted in education, such as Puente, a group with which at least three of the participants occasionally work.
Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to carry out two tasks. First, it has shown readers who social justice activist educators are and how they tend to navigate the policies and structures set up by globalization and neoliberal and neoconservative education regimes. Second, it has rationalized the importance of not only action, but also action supported by communities of activist teachers, united in their vision of social change.

While there is an expansive body of literature surrounding the issues addressed in this chapter, gaps still exist. First of all, there is little scholarship that takes a socio-cultural approach to examining the backgrounds of social justice activist educators and the experiences that brought them to activism in the first place. Second, this work documents how a small group of these teachers work to navigate the pressures; above and beyond the usual pressures of high-stakes testing, standardization, and narrowing curricula; in a state that is particularly hostile to social justice activist educators. While activist teachers in other settings are able to engage in camouflaging strategies, Arizona teachers must work in a system that makes even this tactic dangerous. How do these teachers find other ways to “get around the system”? Finally, this study will examine how a particular group of activist educators work to support each other and both the educative and the activist work in which its members engage. Do these teachers find the support they need and manage to sustain, as the teachers in Goodson (1992), Montaño & Burstein (2006), Jennings & Da Matta (2009), & Picower (2011) or is this network just not enough to sustain their teacher activist selves, as the teachers in Montaño and Burstein (2006) experienced?
As the political climate in the United States continues to necessitate critical examination, social justice activist educators will continue to face great struggles in their mission for equity and social justice. I am hopeful the narratives that will follow in this study will help teachers, teacher educators, communities, and policymakers find and maintain hope and work for social change.
Chapter 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The previous two chapters have sought to illustrate the global, national, state, and local structural pressures facing Arizona’s social justice activist educators. This study seeks to understand how these teachers cope with the negative outcomes of globalization, particularly the standardization of curricula and the passing of anti-immigrant legislation and English only policies. One of the ways they cope is by participating in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). The teachers in this study belong to one such community of practice, Arizona Teachers for Justice. This group has both online and face to face elements. Most members participate on-line in a private Facebook group, which serves primarily as an organizing tool and an information clearinghouse. A subpopulation also gather outside of cyberspace to engage in various actions together and to discuss the needs of both their activist and educator selves and how the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice, can help meet those needs.

This study has its roots in my own frustrations concerning the restrictions various policies placed upon my own practice as a social justice activist teacher. After coming to Arizona to work on my Ph.D. in educational policy, it became clear to me that the restrictions placed on Arizona’s social justice activist educators were even greater than those I had experienced (teaching in other states). I became particularly fascinated by the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice after having a discussion with a couple of teachers who belong to the group. I found myself wondering about how this group helped support its members, if at all. As I began to explore the literature surrounding social justice teacher preparation and the demands placed upon them, it became clear that the creation
of informal support systems, like *Arizona Teachers for Justice* played a crucial role in their support and retention. (See Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011).

In order to investigate (1) how the political climate of Arizona impacts its social justice activist educators, (2) how these teachers cope with and navigate the pressures placed upon them, and (3) how the organization, *Arizona Teachers for Justice* supports its members and their teaching and activism, I have carried out a multiple case study by conducting in-depth interviews with four social justice activist educators who belong to the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*. These teachers spoke to me about their teaching and activism and if and how the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, helps support both.

**Participants**

As their mission statement declares, “We are teachers and supporters who advocate non-violently for social justice by acting, educating and speaking out to promote loving and equitable treatment to all members of our diverse community” (Emilia). I became a peripheral member of this private Facebook group after being invited by a couple of teachers I had met at an event. As I spoke to these members, I realized that the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, would be a great place to recruit social justice activist educators. However, after examining the research surrounding the support and retention of social justice educators, I realized this group was potentially much more than just a place on Facebook where I could learn about upcoming political actions, share ideas about being a social justice educator, or recruit participants for my study; it was potentially a community of practice.
The participants in this study are members of the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*. These teachers, by both their membership in the group, and their own declaration, have identified themselves as activist teachers and they all work in the state of Arizona. Each participant chose his or her pseudonym in an effort to protect his or her identity. Furthermore, all identifying information was changed or omitted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Years in Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3 (co-founder)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Pre-Service</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ángela</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4: Study Participants.* This chart shows all four participants and their years of teaching, participation, and grade levels and content areas taught.

The four participants with whom I worked represent a span of experience and work in various settings. One member, Mary, is currently student teaching, and has only recently become a member of *Arizona Teachers for Justice*. A second participant, Ángela, has been teaching for two years and is also a relatively new member of the group. A third participant, Emilia, is currently in her 10th year of teaching and has been extremely active in the group for the last couple of years. My fourth participant, Fred, has been teaching for 24 years and is a co-founder of the group.

The purpose of this cross section lies in the findings of Lave and Wenger (1991) and the triadic interactions found in communities of practice through legitimate peripheral participation. This concept describes how members of communities of practice (CoP) participate in and contribute to the CoP in different ways, based on their length of time in the group or their profession. These groups are referred to as “masters” or “old
timers”, “young masters”, and “apprentices” or “newcomers” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These terms traditionally elicit notions that certain power relations exist between the masters and apprentices, but Lave and Wenger contend that, within communities of practice, the power relations between these layers are fluid and all members learn from one another in different, but legitimate ways. By selecting participants that fall within these three layers, this study offers a deeper understanding of how this group helps its members learn the necessary coping tools. By finding participants who identify with these three sub-groups, I have also strengthened the validity of the study by providing my readers with multiple viewpoints through which to view the problem. I will discuss other triangulation considerations in a later section.

I do want to note, considering Lave and Wenger addresses a member’s time and thus positionality within the layers of participation within the CoP, I felt time in the profession was a more relevant identifier for this study, particularly since the group is relatively young. Future study, however, could examine how a teacher’s grade level impacts his or her coping mechanisms.

**Sampling and Recruitment**

The sampling method used in this study was purposive, in that it represents a subset (social justice activist educators who belong to *Arizona Teachers for Justice*) of a larger population (teachers) to serve the specific purpose of understanding how these particular teachers work in a specific place (Arizona). In order to protect my participants, they were all asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix B), chose their own
pseudonyms, and no identifying information was used in any reporting of the data. Participants were alerted of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Once IRB approval was garnered, I sent out a message on the *Arizona Teachers for Justice* Facebook page, letting the group know the overall questions I hoped to answer. Interested participants were asked to send me a private message. After the first message went out, I immediately received messages from four of the members of the group. I was able to set up interviews with two of the members almost immediately. The other two members have very busy schedules and thus, scheduling a meeting proved to be very difficult.

After sending out a second message to the group, and trying to connect with the other members who had contacted me, I began to try a snowball recruitment strategy. I contacted the group and asked them to let anyone else know, who may belong to the group, but may not be on Facebook, to send me a message. I received two emails and one text message a day after I sent the message to the larger group. All three of these participants let me know that my first participant had contacted them to tell them about my study and they were interested in participating. I was able to schedule two more interviews with two of the three who had contacted me. This recruitment left me with four participants, each of whom had various levels of participation within the group and various levels of teaching experience.

**Multiple Case Study Methods: Explanation and Rationale**

As previously mentioned, this was a qualitative study that employed the use of multiple case studies. I chose this method and utilized semi-structured interviews,
observations, and member checks, for several reasons. First of all, and most
pragmatically, as I examined the scholarship surrounding the topics central to my
research, I noticed that they all relied on qualitative methods and the majority of them
used the case study method and interview protocols to examine the phenomena studied.
Second, qualitative research places the researcher in the thick of it all and calls on her to
critically observe and interpret phenomena in terms of how her research participants
make sense of them. I believe in honoring the voices of my participants because, as Stake
(2010) explains:

Two realities exist simultaneously and separately within every human activity.
One is the reality of personal experience, and one is the reality of group and
societal relationship. The two realities connect, they overlap, they merge, but they
are recognizably different. What happens collectively (for a group) is seldom the
aggregation of personal experience. (p. 18)

Qualitative research allows us to tease out all the different influences and layers
surrounding human activity.

Although this study is about a group, it is also about the individuals who make up
the group. Therefore, a multiple case study approach was used so I could attempt to 1)
understand who these teachers are as individual social justice activist educators, 2)
understand them as the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice, and 3) gather richer, more
nuanced data in an attempt to provide more generalizable findings. Although, I must say,
my goal is not to create generalizable ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard, 1979), per say, but I
recognize that the larger community will be more willing to recognize the value of this
research if I attempt to move my work beyond just one case to “allow for greater
opportunity to generalize across several representations of the phenomenon” (Borman, Clarke, Cotner, & Lee, 2006, p. 123). The use of multiple case studies is particularly useful for this study in that case studies “concentrate on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (Stake, 2005, p. 444). The term “social justice activist educator” already signals multiple layers of identity and my attempt with this study is to understand these layers and how they all work together with others who hold the same title and are influenced by and exert influence on the structures in which they exist.

Data Collection and Analysis

Because of its potentially subjective nature, qualitative research often relies on multiple collection methods to validate findings (Flick, 2002). Denzin (2005) refers to this as methodological triangulation. According to Stake (2005), “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p. 454). Essentially, triangulation, by use of multiple collection methods, allows the researcher to view the case in varied ways, providing richer and more nuanced data.

For the purpose of this study, triangulation was achieved by (1) interviewing participants who have different positions within the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice, and have been teachers for varied lengths of time; (2) monitoring the activity of participants on the group’s Facebook page; and (3) carrying out member checks throughout the process and as I coded and analyzed data to confirm or contradict my findings. (See figure 5)
Figure 5. Triangulation scheme. This figure illustrates the steps that were taken to ensure triangulation.

I believe the added step of member checking is particularly important because, as Goodson (1992) stated:

The study of teachers’ lives depends for its viability and desirability upon teachers themselves. They initially control most of the important data and all those involved in such study must ensure that they continue throughout the process to exercise control and to be actively involved in the negotiation and production of reports. (p. 16)

Semi-structured interview protocol. I have chosen a semi-structured interview protocol for this study. By having a set of questions, but allowing for flexibility, I attempted to encourage more detailed discussions with my participants to emerge around the topics I have presented. In his book, Studying Teachers’ Lives, Goodson (1992) called for educational research that foregrounds the voices of teachers.

Studying teachers’ lives will, I suspect, never become mainstream, for such study seeks to understand and to give voice to an occupational group that have been
historically marginalized. Yet, as a group, teachers retain considerable power, and as is often the case much truth resides in the margins. (p. 15)

I believe the semi-structured interview protocol provided the teachers in my study the space to have their voices heard as they talked about issues surrounding their socially just, activist pedagogies and their struggles to navigate the structural constrictions placed upon them by neoliberalism and neoconservativism.

Participants were asked the following questions during our semi-structured interviews. Some participants answered the questions without me asking them, and in some instances, I had to ask the question several times, in different iterations, to gather the information I was seeking.

1. How does being an activist influence your teaching practices? How does it manifest in your classroom?

2. What events brought you to identify yourself as an activist teacher?

3. How have the various laws passed over the last few years (The Ethnic Studies Ban, SB1070, English only laws) impacted your teaching? Your activism?

4. Have you ever felt singled out, either negatively or positively, for your social justice based teaching?

5. Tell me about a moment in your teaching where you “went against the grain”?

6. How does the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice, help you in your activism? Your teaching?

In an attempt to respect the busy schedules of all of my participants, the interview was given a time limit of two hours. Several participants were interested in speaking with
me for longer amounts of time and I did not cut them off so that they were able to fully share their stories.

**Data analysis.** After face-to-face interviews were completed, the audio files were sent to a professional transcription service to be transcribed. Once the written transcripts were returned, I did a cross check to fix any mistakes that were made during the transcription process. After all errors were corrected, I began the coding process in ATLAS.ti.

I began with a list of preliminary codes based on my research questions. I also relied on some codes I developed after examining the scholarship surrounding the coping mechanisms used by social justice educators. These codes allowed me to organize my initial analysis around the posed questions. However, analysis was left open to the emergence of other codes and themes, and several new themes did indeed emerge. Figure six illustrates the codes that were used as I analyzed the transcripts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Level One Code</th>
<th>Level Two Code</th>
<th>Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Climate</td>
<td>Impact on Activism</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Singled out</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>Camouflaging</td>
<td>Integrating social justice practices and materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping the door closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Substituting materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keep Teaching and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activism Separate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Change in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practice
Open Rejection to Policies
Engaging in public protest/action
Speaking out about policies in the school/classroom

Participation in Support Groups
Supportive Administrators and Colleagues

Identifiers
Grade Level/Content Area
Number of Years in Group
Number of Years Teaching

Arizona Teachers for Justice History of Group
Future of Group

Figure 6. Code List. This figure illustrates the codes I have created to analyze data.

Parameters of the Study and Potential Bias

As previously mentioned, my goal with this study was not to provide any sort of sweeping generalizations. The teachers in this study work in a very particular time and space. They are a unique group of educators and have varied perceptions of education in Arizona, even if they are all social justice activist educators. My goal, however, was to illustrate one example of one group in one place at one time so that others can begin to imagine possibilities for working within an oppressive system, ultimately altering the systems that create and sustain these oppressions. I do want to address two potential limitations, however. First of all, this study explores the narratives of only four members of the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*. These teachers had much to say and their
stories offered very rich data from which to draw powerful conclusions. However, as future research directions are developed, I hope to include more teachers’ stories to help round out the data and provide the reader with even more powerful recommendations for policy and practice. The second limitation I wish to address is the fact that the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, is a relatively new organization, having only been created three years ago. As time passes, I hope to examine how the group further develops as a Community of Practice for its members.

I am an activist educator, and have brought a level of “insider” knowledge; an emic perspective. This could potentially lead to bias. This has been evident throughout the process of developing and carrying out this study. I constantly reminded myself to be aware of my bias, make my views transparent, and reframe my work accordingly. However, this is a topic I am passionate about because of my positionality as both a social justice activist educator and teacher educator.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this study focused on only one particular type of teacher network; namely, a justice oriented one (Ritchie, 2012). There are other types of teacher networks that are used by educators, and in fact, several of the participants of this study belong to other activist groups and/or teacher groups. As tempting as it was to dig deeper into participation in these other groups, such research falls outside of the realm of this particular study. Future research will seek to explore these types of networks and dig more deeply into the participation of these teachers. Another way I hope to expand this research is to talk to teachers in other states who face challenges, either similar or different, from the participants in this study and belong to groups such as *Arizona Teachers for Justice*. 
I am not an active participant in what Arizona educators are experiencing in their classrooms at this time. Therefore, I also bring a level of “outsider” knowledge, or an etic perspective. While I do, indeed, live in the state and am aware of the political climate in which these teachers work, and have been impacted by it in many ways, I am not fighting the battles they are fighting. I believe this places me, the activist educator and me, the policy scholar, at a provocative intersection. My hope is that this powerful study can help bring the voices of these teachers to a larger audience within both the academy and the larger policy realm so that changes can potentially be made in the teacher education field as well as within the fields of education policy and school reform.

Just as Freire, and many other critical scholars tell us, teaching is a political act. Critical research such as this is also a political act, which makes it daunting, yet exciting, and I would argue, incredibly necessary. As Apple says:

Critical research in education is guided by a set of broad ethical and sociocultural commitments: extending the reality of democracy to all of this society’s groups and institutions, including all of its economic, political, and cultural life; eliminating the basic causes of the massive differences in wealth and power, in economic and cultural capital; investigating the ways in which education participates in maintaining these differences or may be employed to alter them; and providing important aspects of the theoretical, historical, and empirical resources to help us challenge rightist offenses and to defend the gains that have been made in schools and elsewhere. (Apple, 1999, p. xix)

It is my hope that the following chapters, the narratives, analysis and conclusions, will provide my readers with a deeper understanding of the world created by the neoliberal
and neoconservative policies that have so greatly impacted not only our schools, classrooms, and teachers, but our society as a whole.
Chapter 4

NEGOTIATING ARIZONA POLICY IN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE COMMUNITY

This chapter presents findings related to how the social justice activist educators in this study navigate the pressures of unjust state and local policies in their classrooms and political activism. This data fuels the analysis for the next chapter that seeks to answer the research questions 1) How does the political climate of Arizona impact the teaching practice and political action of its activist teachers, 2) How do social justice activist educators in Arizona navigate the political pressures employed by the state and local district policies, and 3) How does the organization, Arizona Teachers for Justice support its members’ teaching and activism?

First, this chapter will introduce, in greater depth, the four focal teachers who participated in this study. I will share their stories about how they became social justice activist educators and I will share their discussion about how the political climate in Arizona has impacted their work, both in the classroom and in the community. They will speak of the fears they face as well as the moments that fuel the fire inside them. They will talk about being singled out, both negatively and positively, for their convictions. Using the work of Goodson (1992), McNeil (1988, 2000a & 2000b), Montaño & Burstein (2006), Jennings & Da Matta (2009) and Picower, (2011) to inform and frame my analysis, I will explore the ways these four teachers cope with the stresses of their work. I will talk about if and how they camouflage, openly reject policy, and find “in house” support from like-minded colleagues and administrators. Finally, I will share their narratives on how the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice has helped them by supporting
their teaching and activism outside of their classrooms. The reader will learn how the group was born, how it is evolving, and how the members feel the group has helped support their teaching and activism.

**Meet the Teachers**

**Emilia.** Emilia identifies herself as half white and half Mexican-American. She explains that growing up she was one of the only Mexican kids in her mostly white suburban neighborhood. She says she realized early on that she didn’t identify with the middle class white America and did not want to be seen as such.

…when I was a little girl, second grade, I decided like no way was I gonna' be anything that made a lot of money. I was never gonna dye my hair blonde…I always noticed inequalities. Not that I didn’t take part in them and treating people unfairly, but I always noticed something. (Emilia)

She is currently a 4th grade teacher in the Phoenix area. This is her 10th year as a teacher and she has taught various grade levels and subject areas at different schools over the years. When asked about how she came to be a social justice activist teacher, she explained:

What I would say really made me an activist, was M.E.Ch.A⁴….that’s where I really got it. They started talking about idea, like how do you go about helping other Chicano kids. That’s how I became really, starting to think about, well, what should I do for other people? My senior year of high school, I always felt like a

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⁴ M.E.Ch.A stands for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán. It is a student organization that promotes higher education, culture and history with the goal of creating a “society free of imperialism, racism, sexism, and homophobia.” ([http://www.nationalmecha.org/about.html](http://www.nationalmecha.org/about.html)) They believe that political involvement and education are the modes to bring about societal change.
lot of the Mexican American kids didn’t really get that we had the opportunity to move out of the current position that we were in. I think that’s what I try to get across to my kids now. We have an opportunity to move out of the position that we’re in. To not just be another statistic and not full of complacency, but to really do something in our world, to change things for our people. (Emilia)

She also spoke about a humanities teacher she had during this time in high school who helped push her toward her first activism attempt.

She had suggested that maybe if I wanted to get a minority history class, that I should try and get a group of kids to take this class that they offered in the course work. She’s like, ‘It’s here and we have to offer it legally. You just have to get enough kids to sign up for it.’ I ran around and I got 15 students to sign up for it. The counselors came into the room…and they were talking to each one of us and she actually said, ‘You can’t take this class. We don’t offer this class.’ I was like, well, it says in the course work you do and my teacher told me that if I get enough kids that I can take this class. Then she was like, ‘So you’re re the one who did this?’ She was like you cannot do this. This is not acceptable and we will not be doing this class. If you continue this any further, you will get in trouble.’ (Emilia)

Emilia’s passion for social justice and equality has been with her for many years and it continues to fuel the work she does.

Fred. Fred is a white male who has been teaching in the Phoenix area for 24 years. Currently he teaches high school social studies. He and his wife are very active in many different activist circles and also involve their children as often as possible. When asked about how he came to be an activist, he says:
I’m a Christian and that’s an underlying part of my personality that, really, I can’t avoid sharing as far as Christian values of love thy neighbor…Jesus wanted to help everybody. He didn’t just help white people or rich people…So, I see what I’m doing as a teacher, helping young people, working with them all day, and try to develop their character as best I can. I want my students to be honest. I want them to be respectful of one another. Another one of the biggest influences for me, believe it or not, was the movie Gandhi. [It] really changed my life…[T]he values they bring out in that movie just seemed to match everything that was already important to me as far as not being tied to personal possessions. Maybe the highest, most important thing you can do is to help other people and establish a sense of community, a sense of unity and a voice for people that don’t have a voice, but through nonviolence and sacrifice. (Fred)

He also explained how, as a college student in the 80s he was always searching for outlets for his activist self, and had a hard time finding such outlets. He tried to get involved in a few different actions in college, but didn’t really get involved in protests and political actions until he protested Proposition 203. He says it was the first time he had “knocked on doors and rang doorbells” and marched in protest against a specific issue.

Yeah, I believe in equality, and I don’t want to give up on that. I think if I ever lose my idealism, it would be disastrous. I mean, I would be losing my whole identity. I know some people think that the idea of supporting equality, racial equality, gender equality, economic equality, as naïve, idealistic, and
unreasonable, but I don’t want to think that it’s impossible…I don’t ever want to give up on that dream. (Fred)

Fred went on to explain that, although he is certainly a social justice activist educator, he tries to keep his activist self separate from his teacher self, yet realizes how difficult it is to keep the two separate.

Well, to be honest with you, I think of my teaching as, like, my day job, and then my real identity, my real passion, is activism and the arts….but I don’t know if that’s really entirely accurate, because I think being an activist is also like a state of mind. So, I don’t think I can really avoid bringing it into the classroom because it’s like my perspective. (Fred)

Mary. Mary is a Mexican-American woman, currently student teaching. She will be graduating this spring, with the goal of teaching upper elementary or middle school in the fall. She offered an interesting perspective as a young teacher who is also new to the activist community. When asked about how she came to identify herself as an activist teacher, she said,

I come from a family of immigrants, and I felt that since I’m the one that is most educated and most knowledgeable of what is going on out there, that I have-I feel responsibility to advocate for them. I feel responsibility to advocate for my future children and my future students…I still know that there’s kids out there whose parents are still migrant workers, and with all these laws they feel threatened, and even though I’m not like them now, I still feel that I’m a part of them. I just identify myself with them so much, because I was one of these young girls that
are scared with all these laws and policies and stuff. I feel responsibility because I can relate to them. (Mary)

When asked to talk about her experience as an activist, she said,

I feel that I am not out there yet where I can feel comfortable with myself to be an activist in front of the community. I feel that I am barely starting to be an activist within my own classroom, and I want to grow and learn how to be an activist out there in the community. (Mary)

Ángela. Ángela is a Colombian-American woman. She moved to Arizona with her parents when she was six and she has been teaching kindergarten through third grade special education for about 2 years now.

When I think about why I teach and how I teach, then it separates me from a lot of other people who teach. I don’t teach just to teach. I don’t teach because kids are cute, because most of the time, they are not! I teach because I think that having foundational skills…in reading and writing and in math is a basic human right, and having a dignified education is something that we all need. I consider myself a teacher who is trying to be conscious, is trying to be respectful of who kids are and who the community is that I teach in…I think I act on things that matter.

(Ángela)

Ángela also talked about why she became a special education teacher. As an undergraduate in college, she began her studies as a bilingual general education teacher. However, as the climate of bilingual education changed in Arizona, thanks to the passing of Prop 203, she realized that she “couldn’t stomach being an SEI (Structured English
Immersion)\(^5\) teacher” so she decided to go into special education because she thought she could get away from teaching the way the SEI block would demand. “I knew from the get-go that SEI in the four-hour block and the segregated classes is going to be recorded as one of Arizona’s biggest mistakes, so I knew that I couldn’t be a teacher in that program.” (Ángela)

It was about the time she finished up her studies that the attacks on Ethnic Studies really began. During this time she began to see how many people were really committed to making education mirror the people of Arizona through the incorporation of culturally relevant and bilingual pedagogies despite these attacks. She found inspiration in this and, after moving to Phoenix, decided to become a part of something. “Once I came up to Phoenix, I knew that I had to become a part of something-some kind of movement that was trying to have everything mirror who we are.” (Ángela)

After meeting with each of the participants and hearing their stories, the most striking realization was that these teachers, even when they believe they are keeping their teacher and activist identities separate, infuse their teaching with an activist spirit that is grounded in their own personal experiences with injustice and inequity. Each participant stated, in one way or another, that their classrooms and their teaching are merely extensions of their activism. This will be evidenced further in future sections of this chapter.

\(^5\) Structured English Immersion is a technique used to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) where all instruction is carried out in English. It is the mandatory mode of instruction in Arizona, California, and Massachusetts after the passing of English only laws in the early 2000s.
Impact of Political Climate on Teaching and Activism

Each of the participants were asked to talk about how the passing of Prop 203 (English only law) SB 1070 and HB 2281 (banning of Ethnic Studies) have impacted their teaching and their activism. The primary response was one of fear, yet that fear seems to be usurped by a sort of revolutionary desire for action. Participants spoke of being singled out in their schools, both negatively and positively, for their activism. I asked them whether or not they had ever felt like leaving the profession or if they’ve left their schools because of these laws. An analysis of their responses follows.

Fear. Fear was the dominant reaction by each of the participants when asked about how Arizona’s political climate has impacted their teaching and activism. While three of the four participants, at some point early in our discussions, make claims that they are not afraid, as the interviews progressed, their fears came out into the open. These fears manifested themselves in many different ways. Teachers feared blacklisting and losing their jobs and even being the ones responsible to open up their students’ eyes to the inequalities that must be faced.

One of the stories Emilia shared illustrates the complex relationship between the fear and desire for action to which all of the teachers in this study allude. This particular instance occurred during the presidential elections of 2012. Emilia made a conscious effort to avoid doing anything too radical in her classroom for the election out of fear. She knows people see her as an activist and she has experienced many instances where her fellow teachers assume certain things about her because of her activism, so during this incredibly charged time, she didn’t want to open the door for controversy. One day, a group of teachers overheard a group of young girls critically talking about the election.
Immediately, they assumed these girls were from Emilia’s class, which they were not.

She stated:

How did they think that? Why would they think that? I mean, it’s scary sometimes! What’s scary about it is, I guess, a lot of the time I spend knowing that I’m doing the right thing, wondering if the education system will at some point start saying anybody that teaches in this manner will be fired from their job. I’m not even scared about being fired from job because I’m doing the right thing. At the same time, I don’t wanna’ be blacklisted. I do know people in the government that are in our education system high up and so that’s scary to think that at any point in time I could be being watched. The more you stick yourself out there, the more you’re asking to have somebody challenge you. Because that’s the nature of oppression, really. They want to keep people from speaking freely, truly freely. (Emilia)

The responsibility of sharing information and opening up her students to the realities of racial and socioeconomic inequalities is scary, too. Emilia says,

I don’t want to be the person that tells them that they’re poor, but, what I’m (more) scared of is that they’ll go on thinking that they’re not poor and thinking that this is the life that many, many, many people live and that they don’t have to ever aspire to be anything more, because nobody else aspired to be anything more. I want them to understand that there are things out there that we can’t even dream about yet that they could be. (Emilia)

Emilia’s fears are complex, yet understandable. Teachers, like Emilia, work in a politically charged profession and deal with the sometimes very complicated lives of their
students and their students’ families. There are very real threats to one’s livelihood when being openly critical of any societal structures.

Fred shared his theory that fear is one of the main culprits as to why more teachers don’t get involved in activist work and why he sometimes tries to keep his activist self quiet at school.

...because the reality is, I need to work. [I]t is dangerous to be overly political. I think that’s why a lot of teachers don’t get involved. They’re fearful for their job. Not every teacher, but a lot of teachers, we just want to play it safe and have a consistent job. Teachers, a lot of them, don’t want to put that at risk, and so they’re afraid of speaking out or it’s not a priority for them. So, I think that’s a big issue. I think there’s real possibility of retaliations, and I’ve heard about it from other teachers that have lost their jobs. (Fred)

Even though she is new to the profession, Mary shared similar fears about the political climate and its impact on her teaching and activism. She worries that as increased controls are placed on teachers and more laws are passed that suppress culturally responsive pedagogies or bilingual programs, her expertise with English Language Learners (ELLs) will become obsolete. In this case, her fears are more about not being allowed to completely actualize her dreams and goals as a young activist teacher. Despite her fears, though, she remains hopeful and determined to maintain her activist identity in her classroom.

I’m a little scared because when I started this teacher preparation, I knew that I wanted to teach ELL’s, English Language Learners, and that’s what I am getting my endorsement in, but sometimes I feel that I’m gonna’ end up not teaching
those type of students, because we won’t-we’re not gonna’ be able to anymore. I’m a little scared that I won’t get to do what I wanted to do. I think it’s normal for someone who’s barely starting out, just because you are scared of what they’re gonna’ think of you. They’re not gonna’ want to hire you. They’re gonna’ look at you like you’re crazy like a rebel. I’m gonna’ get there though. I’m gonna’ come out and I’m gonna’ just support and not be scared to go against these laws and talk about it with my students. (Mary)

Mary shared a story about a particular moment in her student teaching where she felt afraid, but kept forging ahead, despite her fears. She was teaching a lesson on the slave trade while her mentor teacher was in the classroom.

She (the mentor teacher) was doing her work, grading papers or whatever, and after a few minutes I could see her from the corner of my eye just looking at me. I didn’t look at her, because I felt that if I looked at her, she was gonna’ tell me to stop talking. I could see her from the corner of my eye, but I just ignored her, and I kept going. I didn’t feel nervous of what I was doing until the last two minutes when they (the students) were asking about if the kids of these slaves were still slaves, and what would happen to them. Then I could start to feel my heart beating really fast, and I could see her from the corner of my eye, so then I stopped. I thought she was gonna’ say something because she’s not a minority and she doesn’t teach that way either, but she didn’t say anything. (Mary)

Ángela spoke about a similar moment where she became scared about an event she had helped organize at her school, a “Know Your Rights” workshop for some of the undocumented parents. She worked with fellow activists from Puente and invited them to
come one evening to educate these parents about their rights if or when they are faced with police or ICE agents.

They went through the entire process in the school library, and I remember looking over my shoulder thinking, ‘Oh my goodness. I hope the wrong person doesn’t walk in.’ You are always negotiating. You’re never really safe, but that’s ok, because you can find a job anywhere. (Ángela)

She also explained that, “[W]hen different groups get together to do civil disobedience, I automatically kinda’ check myself out because of my job.” (Ángela) So, even though she remains passionate about her work, she recognizes the dangers and will limit her activism in certain instances to protect herself.

In summary, fear is a predominant theme and a very real concern if we hope to support social justice activist educators. The fear these teachers spoke of is complex and multifaceted. It stretches well beyond fears of retaliation or blacklisting. These teachers also share fears about the overall state of the world and whether or not they have the wherewithal to accomplish their goals of fighting for a more just world.

**Singled out.** In a few cases, the teachers’ fear was connected to moments of being negatively singled out, as in the case of Emilia’s colleagues assuming the girls talking about politics were from her classroom. Emilia was also singled out for being absent on the day of a large protest. Her principal called her to find out where she was on that day and she later found out that a memo had gone out from the state education department telling teachers and administrators to keep their eyes out for any teachers who were gone that day for the protest.
That was one instance where the principal or the vice principal didn’t really do anything to me, but it was just like, ‘I’m watching you, don’t forget!’ They see me as a political or like an activist. The people in the school see me as an activist.

(Emilia)

Fred, too, talked about a moment in his career that he was unfairly singled out for his activism.

I had a slightly different job then; I was in charge of technology. So, the students were, not anything I organized, they were organizing a rally against the war. So, I grabbed the school’s camera equipment so I could film it. It was great, but after that there were repercussions, people complaining about the way I did my job. Then pretty soon the principal was like trying to find a way to get me fired, but, of course, never saying it was related to anything else that I did. At one point, among the complaints, he said, ‘Oh yeah, and you were at a protest.’ So, anyway, it was kind of like a backhanded way. So, I know they’ve targeted me and, like I said, I never know if it’s because of my political point of view or it its other things they’re concerned about. (Fred)

Despite these negative experiences, participants often spoke of times they were singled out in a positive way. Fred shared a story of how a group of students gathered to share their appreciation for his work. “I had a few students send me a text message to get my home address. They came to my house with a huge homemade card saying, thank you for being the way you are, and thank you for sticking up for us.”

Mary talked about meeting with her student teaching colleagues.
Every Friday when I meet with my cohort, we talk about what happened during the week. I’m always telling them about what I taught these kids, and they are just fascinated by what I teach. One of them actually said, ‘I wish I was in your social studies class when I was in sixth grade, because I don’t know any of this stuff.’ They’ve told me before, ‘Wow, I can’t believe you’re teaching them,’ and ‘Really? You said that to them?’ all in a good way. (Mary)

Ángela also spoke of being singled out by her colleagues.

I’ve had great conversations with teachers who I know are on the complete opposite political spectrum. We’ve had really positive conversations. At the same time, I am kinda’ known as the teacher who will call the teachers out when I see some kind of unfairness developing, so I think I have kind of developed a little bit of that reputation. (Ángela)

Impacts on employment choices. Finally, I spoke with teachers about whether or not they ever felt like the pressures were just too much and if they had ever left a particular school because of the fear or because of being singled out. Because much of the scholarship surrounding the work of social justice educators declares that many teachers who are dedicated to social justice work in their classrooms leave the profession within the first few years (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Latham & Vogt, 2007), I also asked them if they had ever thought about leaving the profession altogether.

Emilia and Ángela both talked about how they don’t worry so much about standing out because they know they can always find a different school that will better serve their needs. Emilia stated,
I’ve always been at schools that were bilingual or had aspirations of being bilingual schools. I only pick places that are like that because I feel like it (the school) has to go with my philosophy of teaching. I look for places that are like that. I’ve always picked schools that would accept people like myself because I can’t just go into any school. I’m not that kind of a teacher. (Emilia)

Furthermore, despite all the commentary about fear, being singled out negatively, and other pressures found in today’s education climate, only Emilia offered any commentary on leaving the profession if things ever got too bad. We were talking about the part of SB 1070 that would have made teachers report undocumented students when she stated, “If that ever came to me, I would quit. I really would just quit. I would say I’m done. I’m not doing this anymore.” And, recently, she has begun to think more seriously about leaving teaching altogether to focus more on her activism.

I’m getting prepared for my next career, which I’m sure will include less “teaching” things, more working with kids and social justice. I was able to get up the guts to apply for a graduate program, with a focus on justice studies, and while I didn’t get in, it was more of a goal to just apply. To be honest, after I didn’t get in I was happy. I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I was no longer the teacher trying fit social justice into every crevice of her curriculum, but maybe now...social justice can become what I do with kids.

Teaching kids has been the love of my life for quite some time...I’m different now. I can’t wait to see what all this activism does to me. I’m currently thinking of leaving “teaching” all together, but I may just try a charter next year, or something where I can have more flexibility to mold human beings. (Emilia)
Coping Strategies

As discussed in chapter two, social justice educators must find ways to function within the neoliberal and neoconservative controls that continue to gain footage and directly impact today’s classrooms. These strategies include camouflaging (McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011), openly rejecting policies (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011), and creating teacher networks of like minded colleagues both inside and outside of schools (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011). Camouflaging is broken down even further to include instances where teachers either integrate or completely substitute, more radical materials into the set curriculum or they simply close their doors to avoid being “caught” teaching in ways that go against the grain.

Integrating materials or substituting materials, openly rejecting and speaking out against policies in the school or classroom, finding supportive colleagues and administration and participating in various groups were the ways most of the participants coped with teaching in Arizona. None of the participants talked about consciously making a choice to close the doors to hide what they are doing, because the climate in today’s schools is one of constant supervision. Teachers really can’t close their doors, so they opt to either integrate materials and show how their social justice agendas fit in with the state standards or they are just loud and proud about what they are doing and openly reject policies.

I try not to hide behind closed doors. That’s where you can get in the most trouble. I really try not to, well, because there’s nothing I should be ashamed of.
One of my friends, who is an administrator, really helped me to see that. Like, don’t be afraid of it, you’d not doing anything wrong. You’re celebrating what America should be. (Emilia)

This section will focus on camouflaging, openly rejecting and speaking out against policies, and finding supportive “in house” colleagues and administration.

**Camouflaging through integration of materials.** This strategy is not far removed from the fear the teachers in this study feel. These teachers recognize that at times, they must “play the game”. They must adhere to district, state, and national policies in order to keep their jobs and, as one participant put it, “work from the inside” (Mary). As neoliberal and neoconservative policies continue to dominate the school day, teachers are faced with more controls over their practice. The teachers in this study have found ways to stay true to their socially just and activist selves by integrating materials into the prescribed practices they are expected to maintain. They bring in extra books, movies, magazines, maps, and activities that meet state and common core standards but also allow students to critically examine the inequalities that social justice activist educators are dedicated to unearthing.

Emilia explained that her room is full of book bins that are labeled “Latin American Fiction,” “Latin American Non-fiction,” “Civil Rights Non-fiction,” and “Social Justice Issues.” These book bins show her students that she cares about who they are and their histories. She wants them to have access to all sides of the story—not just the one in their textbooks. The beauty of this method, she explained, is that, even though she still worries that “someone from the ethnic studies checking board is going to come in and stop me” (Emilia), they really can’t penalize her because she is still meeting all the
standards. Just having books available to her students doesn’t mean she is focusing only on ethnic studies.

    Emilia was able to justify that her teaching, although seemingly radical in that she works to provide critical viewpoints of various topics, isn’t really all that radical, or rather, shouldn’t really be considered as such.

    When you’re supposed to be teaching about how Columbus came to the Americas, I’m not doing anything wrong. I’m doing exactly what they’re telling me. I’m explaining how and why they came here. The textbook doesn’t suggest that the explorers were great or that they were without fault. (Emilia)

    Fred stated that he doesn’t go out of his way to bring in materials that are slanted any particular way, politically, but believes that the way he frames the content is definitely influenced by his point of view. However, he did go on to say that he is consciously working to integrate topics that often go ignored or get glossed over.

    [L]abor history is totally overlooked. If you look at the Gilded Age, when they talk about immigrant labor coming in, they talk about the captains of industry, building up huge corporations, maybe talk about the fact that they amassed huge fortunes, implying that the workers had to work really really hard. I don’t remember a textbook emphasizing all the strikes and all the organizing action that took place. They’ll focus on the industrialists…so we know about Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller, but do they teach about Bill Haywood? No. And do they teach about Mother Jones and some of the other labor organizers? (Fred)

    Fred has worked diligently to tie his teaching to current events to make learning more meaningful for his students. He shared a story about a time he redirected student
behaviors when rumors of a student led walk out were surfacing. “Students were asking me if I supported the walk out and I told them, ‘No. I don’t support a walk out.’ I felt like, as an employee of the school, I didn’t feel like I could tell the students to walk off campus.” (Fred) Rather than support an action that could potentially get himself and his students in hot water, he did what a good teacher would do. He took something his students were passionate about and made it a teachable moment.

What a better way to have students appreciate civil rights than participating in something that’s completely relevant to them, because the school [population] is like 80 percent Hispanic. A lot of these kids are undocumented or they come from mixed status families. So, I mean, it’s a very personal issue for them. (Fred)

He gathered his students and they planned a protest on campus that would be followed by a trip to the computer lab to write emails to the governor. He typed up a lesson plan, outlining how this action was tied to state standards, and planned to hand it in to the principal. Due to a miscommunication, however, the principal never received the plan, and Fred was later blamed for the walk off, when in reality, he was trying to stop it and engage the students in a more productive activity that was connected to the state standards.

This example demonstrates how Fred strives to integrate social justice material or topics into his teaching, while continuing to adhere to school and state policies. However, because of his reputation, he often faces ridicule, even though he is doing what he is “supposed” to be doing. After teaching about the Occupy Wall Street movement, Fred:

…had parent complaints because I was talking about current events in class and taking away form the content, which, state standards are that we have to talk
about current events. The whole issue of income inequality that was brought out by Occupy Phoenix was extremely relevant and Occupy Wall Street was in the news constantly last school year. (Fred)

Mary works to integrate various issues of justice and equity through the literature that is prescribed. She shared a story of how she and her students read a story about an African slave who, in his village, was a prince, but after Europeans captured him, was brought to America to be a slave. Rather than just reading the story and leaving it at that, she brought in supplemental materials. She showed her students a map of the slave trade, showed them pictures of slaves in chains on a platform, and opened up a discussion.

I do this to get a point across. I’m not trying to create resentment. I’m not trying to do that. I don’t want them to feel sorry, but I want them to know the truth, because I didn’t learn a lot of stuff until I got to college. I feel that if I don’t teach it, maybe nobody else will. I would rather them know it now in sixth grade than in college…because maybe if they learn it in sixth grade, it will affect their lives. It will affect the people around them. (Mary)

This strategy isn’t as easy for all the teachers to employ. For example, because she is a special education teacher and she has very limited time with the students, Ángela talked about how it’s more difficult for her to substitute or integrate materials. And although she explained that, “We are also talking about issues all the time and I’m very candid with them.” she must work to integrate issues of social justice in a more subtle manner.

I think I do it (integrate issues of social justice) just through my every day practices. We have a model of independence and self-sufficiency while we have
co-dependency, so everyone has clear expectations of what they need to do while there is an expectation of teamwork. Everyone is responsible for everyone.

(Ángela)

Even though she doesn’t have space for bins full of critical literature or time to engage in hermeneutic examinations of current events, through her actions, she is still able to instill a sense of justice and equality, while remaining compliant to the demands of Arizona’s state standards.

**Open rejection of policy.** The greatest coping strategy employed by these teachers was certainly camouflaging of some sort, and most of the open rejection of policy by these teachers happens outside of the school walls, but they do occasionally engage in moments of open resistance in their schools and classrooms. Emilia has found a way to merge camouflaging with an open rejection by providing materials for her students. “They do say that you’re not supposed to have Spanish language books. I do have them. I have bilingual books. I buy every single bilingual book I can find.” (Emilia)

Other teachers talked about how they openly speak about the situation in Arizona with their students. For example, Mary states, I’m gonna’ come out and I’m gonna’ just support and not be scared to go against these laws and talk about it with my students. I feel that if you can talk to it-if you can talk to your students about it, you can talk to anybody about it. I want my kids to know what I know about the laws. When I find out that they don’t know something that they should know, something that I think is important about anything, not just minorities, just about different types of people, when I find out that they don’t know about it, it’s like, ‘What? Really? Ok, now I have to teach it
to you. This is what it is.’ Yeah, these laws change you for good or for bad, I guess. (Mary)

She went on to talk about the moment during student teaching when she experienced a moment of fear after challenging the thoughts of her students and her mentor teaching.

I wasn’t gonna’ apologize or anything, but teachers are not doing what they should be doing as far as what they’re teaching us to do, like culturally responsive teaching. She’s (her mentor teacher) not applying it, so it’s like these kids are getting way without learning that or without feeling like they matter. They know they’re just a test score. I wish I could stop that, I guess. I can’t do it with all the kids in the world, but I’ll do it with my class. It’s like they’re so focused on the objectives and the assessments, but what about the discussions and the books? (Mary)

Once again, we can see the effect fear has on the way the teachers in this study approach their rejection of policy. They are most certainly actively engaged in open rejection, but that “out in the open” sort of fighting happens most often outside their classroom walls. However, they do find moments in their day to speak openly about the unjust policies that the people of Arizona must face.

**In house support.** Despite the stresses and the fear, almost all the participants (3 out of 4) talk about how lucky they are to have supportive colleagues and administrators.

Emilia explained that she has only ever had one principal who was not supportive of who she is and what she does. “People have always been pretty supportive, and I’ve always picked schools that would accept people like myself because I can’t just go into any school.” (Emilia) She also talked about one of the schools at which she worked.
It was just a part of the way they lived and had their culture. You didn’t hide because there was nobody to hide from. Everybody was like you. Any administrator that I have, you have to know that I’m gonna’ have your back. I’m gonna’ do everything that I possibly can to make these students grow or to make them feel comfortable, to make them love school and to change students’ lives. (Emilia)

Ángela described her experience teaching in Tucson in 2010. “I taught at a bilingual school in Tucson where there was a really great mix of people, but mostly it was just people who really understood what being bilingual meant and what the community would look like.” She maintains a positive outlook on finding allies.

I think that another key part of maintaining positivity-maintaining kind of a focus-is finding allies within the school. A lot of times, there are allies that you wouldn’t suspect are allies. I think when you talk to people and you come from a point of truthfulness and a point of good intention, we can get a lot of stuff done. But, I do feel that a lot of the teachers that I don’t feel like I can reach out to are the teachers that are burn out, and I get it, trust me, I get it! (Ángela)

**Arizona Teachers for Justice**

The unifying characteristic of this group of teachers is the fact that they all belonged to the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, in some capacity. Fred is one of the co-founders, Emilia has been with the group for a couple years now, and Mary and Angela have only just recently joined the group. Each participant was asked whether or not the group provided them with any sort of support in terms of their teaching and activism. And, if it did, what sort of support did it provide? In this section, I provide the
What is Arizona Teachers for Justice? According to its mission statement, *Arizona Teachers for Justice* is:

A safe place for people to discuss topics that are at the core of our mission to support families, students and the best interest in the community. We are teachers and supporters who advocate non-violently for social justice by acting, educating and speaking out to promote loving and equitable treatment to all members of our diverse community. (Emilia)

Currently, the group maintains an online presence and interacts with its 56 members primarily through this Facebook group. I spoke with Fred about the group’s beginnings and he and Emilia both offered insight into where they see the group going in the future.

How did it begin? In 2010, around the time that Russell Pearce was promoting SB1611, which, if passed, would have required anyone working in a school to turn in the names of anyone they thought may be undocumented. Fred was approached around this time by a local activist/community organizer.

She approached me and she said, ‘Well, I know you are a teacher and I’ve been collecting this database of teachers that say they’re interested in doing activism. Do you want to organize a meeting?’ I said, ‘Well, you know, there’s some urgent stuff going down right now. So, I don’t want to organize a meeting. I want to organize a protest.” (Fred)
She organized a sign-making party and helped with the promotion. Fred wrote up the call for action and this organizer sent it out to the media. At the protest, they had about maybe 100-150 people there, but it was well covered in the media. Fred explained:

I did interviews, just talking about the fact that we’re teachers, we’re here to educate students, not to lock them up or kick them out of school. We want students to get an education. We don’t what their families to be deported. We don’t want students to be deported. (Fred)

The protest was planned for after work hours, “mostly because we’re teachers and we had to work. So, it was really to accommodate our own schedule, not because we were afraid of confronting the senators.” (Fred)

According to Fred, it ended up being a really successful protest, which fueled the creation of the group.

I think we did a good job of making our point. There were some really fantastic teachers that were part of that protest, that had really good sound bites on the news, that kind of probably made people think about it. It’s like, do we really want to start attacking children? Is undocumented immigration really so serious that we have to turn our teachers into agents that are going after children and hurting children? After the protest, we had a huge meeting. There were probably about 50 people there. People were interested. (Fred)

**How is it evolving?** According to Fred, the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, was founded out of the necessity for action. The initial participants felt driven by both their activist and teacher selves to do something to ensure the safety of their students and their students’ families. Over the past three years there have been many other calls to
action that have kept the group motivated. As I examined the archives of postings on the Facebook page, it is obvious that the group functions as a sort of clearinghouse for information and invitations for various actions. Members consistently post links to websites or articles about issues impacting the students and families with whom they work. Members also post information about and invitations to political actions around the state. For example, recently the group worked diligently to collect signatures for the Recall Sheriff Arpaio Campaign⁶.

I was curious to hear what Fred, as one of the founding members, had to say about the group as it stands, now that some time has passed and the wave of resistance to SB1611 has seemingly passed.

Right now, the group is kind of dormant. I’ve got mixed feelings about that, but on the other hand, I don’t really want to impose on peoples’ time to have a meeting if there’s nothing going on. I think a lot of the teachers that are involved in Arizona Teachers for Justice are also involved with other organizations, so they can still get involved in activism. There are different outlets for activism. So, Arizona Teachers for Justice, at this point, exists mostly as a Facebook page and a Facebook group. It’s a secret group, and the reason I made it that way is, I thought it would be like a working forum where we could debate our mission statement or plan actions. It hasn’t really turned out that way. We haven’t really used it to plan actions, [but] as a way to invite people to action, it’s beautiful!

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⁶ The Recall Sheriff Arpaio Campaign was a grassroots effort spearheaded by the group, Respect Arizona whose goal was to gather enough support to recall Sheriff Joe Arpaio.
So, basically, we’ve jumped on other actions that people are involved in and are promoted, and other people in the group have promoted it. We’ve gotten together sometimes for social events, to support each other. The infrastructure is still in place, and even if it’s not the same exact teachers, it’s that concept that we have, so when they want to introduce something that’s so outrageous like they did in the past with SB 1611, we can definitely pull some teachers together. (Fred)

Time, then, is a huge hurdle for the members of the group. Again, not that they aren’t engaging in activist work; they are engaging in a great deal of activist work on top of their teaching. This is what makes them social justice activist educators, after all.

Emilia explains:

There’s a core group of people…myself and maybe two other people who have been trying to keep the flames burning. I would say that it’s not necessarily a lack of interest on the teachers’ part, but teachers have so much to do that I think it’s really hard. We’re already over extended to a large degree. One female in the group teaches history at a high school and she also does M.E.Ch.A. I do a social justice club and the community service club. There is a Spanish teacher that does Spanish club and is also currently helping student with deferred action paperwork. [Another member] is always involved in various outside activism and I would say his wife as well. She is also a teacher and does a lot of work. I would say we’re all doing stuff and it’s really hard to get us together. We actually just had a discussion about what’ gonna’ be our role right now. Are gonna’ dissolve the group or are we gonna’ keep going the way we have been. I think right now we
are just gonna’ keep moving on as an information source and hopefully something
sparks interest.

She also revisits the topic of fear. She and Fred both believe some of the members are
afraid to be a part of the group out of fear of retaliation, and perhaps, this fear, is part of
the reason why the group has evolved the way it has.

Part of the benefit and part of the problem with grassroots organizations is that
everybody is supposed to be involved. I think a lot of people shy away from the
group for that reason. Maybe they’re afraid of being seen as part of the group
even though they listen and look and they support. They don’t want to be seen as
an active member. (Emilia)

**How do the members feel?** Participants of this study were asked to reflect on
whether or not they felt that the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, offered them any
sort of support in their teaching and/or their activism. Every participant’s response
seemed to be an extension of their commentary on finding allies in their schools. They
agree that the group has served as a similar sort of support net, but one that exists outside
of their school walls.

Yeah-it’s gives me people to talk to about similar interests and not feel so
isolated, because on campus, it can be kind of isolating. *Arizona Teachers for
Justice* is a chance to interact with teachers that get it, that look at things more
objectively and understand what’s really going on in the world, instead of like just
being bamboozled by the smokescreens and what it is, the capitalist elite want
people to think. So, yeah, it helps me in that way. (Fred)
Mary agreed with Fred, and also echoed the sentiment of time restraints on her more active participation in the group.

First of all, people in the group are like, wow! It’s a great resource. My mentor added me to the group and I just started learning about all these things from all these people who are super-educated and super-aware. They’re activists. They’re smart. I read their articles. I want to get more involved, but honestly, they interfere with my schedule. Time and scheduling, but yeah, it’s helpful just being aware…because when you are aware of things that happen, why wouldn’t you be an activist? If you are not aware, you can’t be, but once you’re aware, you should be.

Ángela, who, like Mary, is relatively new to the group, expressed both excitement as well as a belief in the necessity for the group.

I think there definitely needs to be a network of radical educators, people who are on the same page, because I just-I always kinda’ felt helpless. We never felt empowered or even have the know how of how to do anything about it, how to talk to the unions about saying no, how to really get in there and really do the work that we need within our schools, sort of how to find the work outside of school and kinda’ figure out a way to bring it in to school. We (Phoenix) have a lot going on, and there are a lot of us, and we’re just maybe not in communication. I know there are a lot of other great people who are doing important work, but I don’t know what they’re doing. I don’t know how I can learn from them. I think if anything arises from this (group) it would be a great
chance for us to hear other teachers say yeah and kinda’ validate what we’re doing and not feel so crazy like we do all the time, every day.

Finally, Emilia explained how much of an impact the group has had on her teaching and activism over the past few years of its existence.

Man, it almost brings tears to my eyes to think about how much I have changed over the course of the last couple years. I know I will never go back to just being a teacher…I can’t. Before Arizona Teachers for Justice I didn’t think I could do the action. I thought I would just have to support. No more. I have been able to develop some pretty good relationships over the last couple years; I’ve been very involved in justice issues relating to race, and immigration.

Although Arizona Teachers for Justice is a relatively young group and its members come with multiple levels of commitment and experience, the group certainly plays a powerful role in the lives of these teachers. These teachers know they are not alone and that they have a place to turn when they need support or information.

Summary

This chapter has offered narratives from four social justice activist educators who belong to the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice and has provided qualitative data to support this study’s line of inquiry: 1) How does the political climate of Arizona impact the teaching practice and political action of its activist teachers, 2) How do social justice activist educators in Arizona navigate the political pressures employed by the state and local district policies, and 3) How does the organization, Arizona Teachers for Justice support its members’ teaching and activism? These teachers have much to say about each of these questions, as is evidenced above. They speak primarily of fear, yet they are
comforted in the knowledge that they have support systems in place, both in and out of their schools. Their narratives are powerful and needed because, as Ángela stated:

I feel that a lot of teachers who are like-minded won’t be teachers long because it won’t be worth the fight within the school. We’ll keep fighting for the same thing, but we’ll just have to be more creative of how we do it. When I started going to school, that was a common thought—you can fight it from within the school. Now, I think it’s a rarity to be able to do something like that from within the school.

If we hope to keep dedicated teachers, like these four, in the classroom, we need to better understand their fears, their coping mechanisms, and their overall needs. In chapter five, I will probe more deeply into the larger themes that have emerged from the data presented in this chapter. I will revisit the literature and seek to answer the research questions I set out to answer in the first chapter all in an effort to seek out more effective and sustainable modes for supporting social justice activist educators.
The goal of this study was to examine how a small group of social justice activist educators in the state of Arizona, an already racially, culturally, economically, and linguistically divided state that is particularly barraged by neoliberal and neoconservative policies and legislation, deal with the challenges of teaching and fighting for justice. They identify themselves as activists, belong to different grassroots organizations and participate in various political actions. These teachers engage in activism, not only in their communities, but in their schools and classrooms as well.

Teachers, such as the ones who participated in this study, have a particularly difficult job and many teachers who begin as passionate advocates for more equitable pedagogies often find themselves leaving the profession (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Latham & Vogt, 2007). This study is located at the heart of issues that social justice activist educators struggle with and examined how they are building communities of practice (Wenger, 1998 & Wenger, et al. 2000) against great odds, such as limited time and resources and increased attacks on the students and families with whom they work.

This final chapter will begin by revisiting the conceptual and theoretical framing upon which this dissertation is based. I will review the questions I set out to answer and discuss the methods used to answer these questions. Next, I will provide an in-depth examination of the major findings of this study, using the theories guiding the study, and examine the implications of these findings for policy, practice, and future research.

Review of Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations
This study, as previously mentioned, is based on the struggles faced by teachers who are dedicated to social justice and activism. According to Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman (2002), “Many social justice educators are, in fact, teacher activists in political and social movements working to bring about changes in educational policies that they perceive to be unjust” (p. 265). Teaching is a political act and teachers are nestled snugly in a world dominated by neoliberal and neoconservative policies that are set up to maintain inequalities. Social justice activist educators are constantly battling these inequalities. My own particular experiences as a frustrated social justice educator led me to question why so many teachers, while they made grand claims to be passionate about social justice, were so hesitant to extend their passion to their classrooms and engage in activist work with students. And, how were the teachers who were extending both their activism to the classroom and their teaching to their activism, doing so? What supports did they have that kept them afloat? Furthermore, as a teacher educator, I found myself wondering what was missing from teacher preparation programs that could be added to help future social justice educators better cope with the inevitable pressures of the classroom. The specific questions I sought to answer were:

- How does the political climate of Arizona impact the teaching practice and political action of its activist teachers?
- How do social justice activist educators in Arizona navigate the political pressures employed by the state and local district policies?
- How does the organization, Arizona Teachers for Justice support its members’ teaching and activism?
After examining the literature surrounding the preparation of social justice educators, I noted relative consensus from scholars (Sleeter, 1992; Sachs, 2000 &2003; Kohl, 2002/2003; Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, 2002; and Cochran-Smith, 2008) that while many programs are providing pre-service teachers with specific techniques or practices, they just aren’t doing enough to sustain the social justice activist work that is so desperately needed. An element of activism must be added in order to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, or praxis.

Praxis is the marriage of theory, reflection, and action upon the word so that we may transform it (Freire, 1970/1986). The four teachers introduced in this study don’t merely speak, they act and they don’t merely act, they reflect as well, which is a crucial requisite to consciousness or conscientization (Freire, 1970/1986). Conscientization is the act of coming to an understanding of one’s oppressors—both human and structural. Freire believed that freedom begins once one recognizes the systems of oppression in which he or she exists. Teachers must be reflective, take the theories they learn in the classroom and make them real by engaging in activism because without reflection and action, one cannot become aware of the structures of oppression or hope to alter these structures.

Freire’s work surrounding praxis and conscientization lead me to the sociological theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; & Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). As previously noted, Freire demands we recognize that humans are active agents who engage in the world in community with others. In order to understand how social justice activist educators can best sustain the critical work they carry out within structures and philosophies so antithetical to their own,
this theory is useful in that it connects the shared practices, collective meaning making and identities of teachers so we can better understand how their participation in such groups can support their teaching and activism. This final chapter further unpacks how the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice* functions as a Community of Practice (CoP) and helps support its members.

Finding or creating groups of like minded individuals (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011) is just one way teachers are able to sustain their social justice activist work and while this study examines one such group, there are other tactics teachers have found to be helpful while working in an unsupportive climate. Other coping strategies that the teachers in this study utilized include camouflaging (McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011) and openly rejecting policies (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011). These tactics are indeed useful, but the teachers in this study, despite having all of these tools in their belts, are still overwhelmed by fears that make their work even more challenging. Their fears are complex and varied, but ever present. Further sections of this chapter will further unpack these fears and their impact on the activism and teaching of these teachers.

The findings of this study are elicited from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with four members of the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*. These teachers represented a range of experience and offered different perspectives of what it means to be an activist educator. They were, however, unified in their belief that the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice*, served as a support for both their teaching and their activist work.
The following sections will address the major findings surrounding each research question, beginning with how the political climate has impacted both the teaching practices and the activism of each teacher and ending with how the group, Arizona Teacher for Justice does indeed function as a Community of Practice for its members.

**Impact of political climate**

Teaching is a political act. As the previous chapters have illustrated, teaching for social justice demands teachers be critical of the structural controls that perpetuate the inequalities they work so diligently to rectify. This consciousness is what Paulo Freire believed to be at the root of critical pedagogy and what other scholars (e.g. Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall; 2009) explain is at the root of social justice education. Apple (2010) stated, “Understanding education requires that we situate it in the unequal relations of power in the larger society and in the realities of dominance and subordination—and the conflicts—that are generated by these relations” (p. 152). Teachers exist and work in a field that is particularly susceptible to the effects of globalization: deregulation, privatization, and competiveness of the market (Robertson, 2008).

Again,

We must operate within an overarching truth: public systems of education are increasingly threatened by moves toward privatization, and often serve as assembly lines for the status quo…However, we are faced with a parallel reality: if we do not continue and strengthen our efforts to critique, understand, and create new systems by which to educate young people, we will continue to drown in defeat and the powerful will continue to argue for the destruction of our ability to
dream and move on those dreams. This is what social justice education offers.

(Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall; 2009; xiv)

Teaching is a profession rife with tensions because there are varied ideologies surrounding the purpose of schooling. As previously stated, we must ask complex questions:

Whose knowledge is this? How did it become “official”? What is the relationship between this knowledge and the ways in which it is taught and evaluated, and who has cultural, social, and economic capital in this society? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and from the ways schooling and this society are organized, and who does not? How do what are usually seen as “reforms” actually work? What can we do as critical educators, researchers, and activists to change existing educational and social inequalities and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just? (Apple, 2010, p. 152)

Keeping these complexities in mind, it is easy to understand that the current political climate has a very real and profound effect on teachers. Teachers in Arizona must face an even more complex reality as racist and oppressive laws find their way onto the books of a state dominated by conservative forces. The teachers in this study were asked to reflect on how three particular laws; HB 2281, SB 1070 and Arizona Proposition 203; have impacted their practice. The dominant two themes that came out in my analysis were fear and being singled out. The following two sections address each of these themes in more depth.

**Fear.** Despite their passion and dedication to social justice and activism, the teachers in this study repeatedly used the words afraid, scared, and fear. Fear is a very
real emotion for teachers. As violence in schools increases, as parents and students become increasingly litigious, as teachers’ pay begins to be tied to unjust evaluations and student performance on standardized test scores, and as more teachers begin to fight back against the neoliberal and neoconservative controls that push them against the proverbial wall, fear will continue to impact the psyche of today’s teachers. The teachers in this study are not different from teachers around the country in their fears. However, the fears of these teachers are more complex and nuanced than the fears about job retention or retaliation from administrators. The teachers in this study expressed fear for their livelihoods, but also feared that they might not be strong enough to be good role models. They were afraid of not being able to do enough for their students and they were afraid to be the people who illuminated the inequalities their students face on a daily basis.

What really makes these teachers stand out, however, is that their fears don’t keep them from moving forward. As I discussed in the previous chapter, while the fears of these teachers did indeed show through in their commentary, these teachers continually maintain that they are not afraid. These teachers epitomize what Paulo Freire imagined teachers should be. In his book, Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach, Freire (2005) declares courage to be one of the “[i]ndispensable qualities of progressive teachers for their better performance” (71). He stated:

When we are faced with concrete fears, such as that of losing our jobs or of not being promoted, we feel the need to set certain limits to our fear. Before anything else, we begin to recognize that fear is a manifestation of our being alive. I do not need to hide my fears. But I must not allow my fears to immobilize me. If I am secure in my political dream, having tactics that may lessen my risk, I must go on
with the fight. Hence the need to be in control of my fear, to educate my fear, from which is finally born my courage...That is why though there may be fear without courage, the fear that devastates and paralyzes us, there may never be courage without fear, that which “speaks” of our humanness as we manage to limit, subject, and to control it. (75-76)

The teachers in this study, and many teachers across the globe, do indeed have very real fears, yet they continue to fight. As Emilia explained,

Teachers feel defeated but we are caregivers and nurturers and we just take these burdens upon ourselves and we have self-doubt but we keep going because we have to. If we really stood up, we could do something. We would have to know that standing up means for the long haul, not just for the short. (Emilia)

They have courage because they do not let the fear devastate and paralyze them and the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice, offers them the collegiality and support structure they need to keep above the fear. This finding aligns with the current scholarship that expresses the importance of finding support within networks of like-minded individuals (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Nieto, 2009; Picower, 2011).

The fears expressed by teachers was among the most significant findings of this study, as it ties teachers’ perceptions of how they are impacted by Arizona’s political climate to their activism. This is praxis. Many teachers who are dedicated to social justice work in their classrooms leave the profession within the first few years (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Latham & Vogt, 2007). Learning to name these fears and working to build coalitions with other courageous teachers has very real implications for
supporting and sustaining social justice activist educators in that it is key to maintaining one’s fire and passion for social justice and activism.

**Singled Out.** The second most common theme that emerged while talking to teachers about how the political climate in Arizona has impacted their teaching and activism was being “singled out.” As the climate has become more contentious and these teachers have had to fight more vocally against unjust policies, they are feeling increasingly set apart from their colleagues for their work as social justice activist educators. It is this alienation that compels the need for groups like *Arizona Teachers for Justice.* As administrators and colleagues alienate these activist teachers, they begin to feel alone, ineffective, hopeless and afraid. When social justice activist educators can unite with teachers like themselves, who are also feeling ostracized, they begin to feel a sense of solidarity and to regain their strength.

Man, it almost brings tears to my eyes to think about how much I have changed over the course of the last couple years. I know I will never go back to just being a teacher...I can’t. Before *Arizona Teachers for Justice* I didn’t think I could do the action. I thought I would just have to support. No more. (Emilia)

While the teachers in this study viewed being singled out as just “something I have to deal with and come to terms with” (Mary), it was not always seen as a negative or disheartening experience. As the narratives in chapter four illustrated, three of the teachers in this study, Fred, Mary and Ángela, shared stories about how they were positively recognized for their work. As beacons for justice, they were able to draw in other teachers or students who previously may not have felt as if they could stand up against inequality. Once again, I believe this is an important point when considering the
effectiveness of the CoP. If teachers are able to share with one another, moments of being positively singled out, I believe they will be able to better cope with the fears previously mentioned and garner strength and courage needed to sustain their social justice activist work. After all, as explained in chapter one, the bond shared by the members of a CoP comes from learning together and knowing colleagues who have similar ideas and problems.

**Summary.** Paulo Friere (1970/1986) told us that education is a political act. Social justice activist educators embrace the political nature of education and work diligently to unearth and hold a mirror to structural inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal and neoconservative regimes. The teachers in this study are not unlike other social justice activist educators. They have very real fears, but are, at times, unwilling to admit the fear because they see these fears and the singling out that they face as merely part and parcel of being who they are. Their activism infuses all they do and the fall out from being politically active in a political profession is just “part of the job” (Fred). It’s also easier to bear and/or forget the fear with supportive colleagues and a cache of coping mechanisms. The next sections will address the coping mechanisms these teachers have developed.

**Navigation of Policy and Legislation**

As the previous section illustrates, teachers cannot escape the impact of the political climate on their teaching. This is a reality that some teachers do not acknowledge. They decide to avert their eyes and just do what they are told to do by the “powers that be.” Social justice activist educators, by their nature, do not ignore the political nature of their work and must develop coping mechanisms to help them navigate the tensions proliferated by globalization (See McNeil, 1988, 2000a, & 2000b; Quartz &
TEP Research Group, 2003; Angelides, Stylianou, & Leigh, 2007; Brill, & McCartney, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Jennings & De Matta, 2009; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009; Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010; Eversman & Diaz, 2010; Boyd, D., Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Picower, 2011; & Ritchie, 2012). This section will address the coping mechanisms used by the teachers in this study.

**Camouflaging.** The primary tactic used by the teachers in this study was camouflaging. As mentioned in chapter two, camouflaging refers to the practice of keeping one’s critical practices out of the view of others (See McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011). Sonu (2012) refers to this as “performing the public transcript of neoliberal school culture” (p. 241). This was accomplished a few different ways, but the “safest” way teachers carry this out is by substituting alternative materials and integrating themes of inequality and injustice into the mandated curriculum. This way, social justice activist educators are able to stay true to themselves and engage students in critical inquiry and at the same time avoid potential retaliation by administrators and evaluators who would make claims that standards aren’t being met. This is certainly a useful tactic, but teachers in Arizona must be more creative with their camouflaging, since state laws prohibit the use of many critical and culturally relevant materials, such as the books *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years* (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970/1986).

The teachers in this study are not unlike the teachers from the studies examined in chapter two. They work to make sure their students are engaged in critical inquiry on
multiple levels and sometimes those discussions have to happen under the radar. They bring in critical and culturally relevant literature (Emilia), they provide supplemental materials that push student understanding beyond the surface (Mary), and they create activities that engage their students in activism (Fred). One particularly interesting finding, however, was the number of times participants claimed they kept their teaching and activism separate. This, I believe, is tied to the fear these teachers feel. Fred, in particular, stated, “I think of my, my teaching as like my day job, and then my real identity, my real passion, is activism…”. However, as Fred and I continued to talk, it became very clear that his activism and teaching were not separate at all. He stated, “Yeah, I guess my action is molding students' minds”. He also spoke of how he is consciously working to include more materials about labor history and how he has facilitated critical discussions about capitalism in his social studies classes.

These teachers, even when they believe they are keeping their teacher and activist identities separate, infuse their teaching with an activist spirit that is grounded in their own personal experiences with injustice and inequity. I believe this is also connected to their commentary surrounding being afraid or being singled out. They so completely embody social justice activism and it’s difficult, if not impossible, to divorce their activist identity from their teacher selves. It just is who they are, and in their minds, they aren’t calling on any special strategies. They just are who they are and their classrooms and their teaching are merely extensions of their activism.

Open Rejection of Policy. Another way teachers cope with the pressures of teaching in a globalized world is through openly rejecting policies (Goodson, 1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011).
most dangerous of the coping mechanisms presented in the research as teachers who openly reject polices are at the greatest risk of attracting negative attention, alienating colleagues, and losing their jobs.

Again, the teachers in this study are not unlike the teachers in the literature presented in chapter two in that they are willing to openly reject certain policies that are foisted upon their practice. Some teachers, like Emilia, have merged camouflaging with open rejection. In her case, she provides culturally responsive materials to her students but by doing so, she violates a law that states she is not allowed to have Spanish language books. She says she doesn’t care and that “I’ll keep grabbing up every Spanish language book I can. It’s the right thing to do.”

As I listened to these teachers discuss the times they openly rejected unjust policies, I found it very interesting that the participant who was newest to the profession, Mary, was the one who was most adamant about being loud and proud in her classroom. I’m gonna’ come out and I’m gonna’ just support and not be scared to go against these laws and talk about it with my students. I feel that if you can talk to it-if you can talk to your students about it, you can talk to anybody about it. Perhaps this has something to do with being newer to the profession and not having been beaten down as much as the more veteran teachers have been or perhaps it is just her temperament. The answers to these questions lie outside the scope of this study, but are fodder for future research.

Despite their attempts to openly reject policy in their classrooms or schools, these teachers are most vocal outside of their classrooms. They are activists, after all. They are active in grassroots organizations; they are out on the capital lawn or walking the streets
protesting. Still, speaking out against unjust practices can be tenuous at the best of times and in the most progressive settings, but in a state like Arizona, it can be even more daunting. Fear, as I discussed above, permeates the lives of these teachers much more than they are willing or able to admit. Returning to the study conducted by Picower (2011), this finding is not surprising. Picower (2011) explains that, even though the teachers in her study were able to develop coping mechanisms they were not able to attack the larger neo-liberal agenda and thus make more impactful, system wide changes. Perhaps the fact that these activist teachers are out in the streets, protesting and fighting against the larger social structures is enough, and the development and honing of their coping mechanisms is sufficient even if these mechanisms simply help to maintain and do little to transform the broader neoliberal agenda.

**In Solidarity: Arizona Teachers for Justice as a Community of Practice**

We know the teachers in this study are afraid for many reasons, and rightly so. We know they have developed coping mechanisms not unlike other teachers in other states. Like teachers in other states, (Goodson,1992; Montaño & Burstein, 2006; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009; & Picower, 2011), the teachers from this study have also found allies, both inside and outside their schools. Three of the four teachers in this study spoke of in house allies who helped to make their fight for social justice easier. These allies are incredibly important. So important, in fact, that one of the participants just recently told me that she decided to leave her school because the principal, her strongest ally, was leaving and she didn’t want to work in the building without her. However, the teachers in this study spoke primarily about their allies outside of their schools.
As this study has progressed, the questions that have ended up taking center stage were how does the organization, *Arizona Teachers for Justice* support its members’ teaching and activism and does this group function as a Community of Practice? As the literature in chapter two demonstrated, teachers who are able to find groups such as *Arizona Teachers for Justice* felt that the group gave them a “respite where they received reinforcement, solidarity, healthy competition, and a sense that they were a part of something bigger” (Picower, 2011, p. 1118). The teachers in this study echoed this sentiment. The group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice* became a place where they could work in solidarity with their fellow teachers. In other words, it became a place where the teachers could find the support they so desperately needed to garner the strength to enact their critical pedagogy.

*Arizona Teachers for Justice* is a grassroots group of social justice educators who want to work together to “advocate non-violently for social justice by acting, educating and speaking out to promote loving and equitable treatment to all members of our diverse community” (Emilia), but is it a Community of Practice? According to Wenger, McDermontt, & Snyder (2002), “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). The people who belong to a CoP do not necessarily work together on a daily basis, but as they spend time together they help each other solve problems and collectively make meaning of the project in which they are engaged. Their bond comes from learning together and knowing colleagues who share similar ideas, problems, and perspectives and they develop a feeling of a common mission and identity. By this definition alone, one could
claim that the group, *Arizona Teachers for Justice* is a Community of Practice. As I’ve been monitoring the group’s activity on Facebook I have seen problems being solved collectively. I’ve witnessed the collective development of the mission statement and I’ve read countless articles about critical issues in education that members have posted in an effort to keep each other informed.

Wenger explains there are three essential characteristics that must be present to have a CoP: domain, community and practice (Wenger, et al., 2002, p. 45-46). The domain is comprised of the topics and issues the group collectively agrees to and that feed the passions of the CoP’s members. The community refers to the structural issues the group must work out, such as roles people will play, how often and where the group will meet, how will new members be admitted, and what kind of activities will bind members in trust. And finally, practice refers to how the group will “become an effective knowledge resource to its members and to other constituents that may benefit from its expertise” (Wenger, et al. 2000, p. 46). (See also Wenger, 1998)

The domain for *Arizona Teachers for Justice* is relatively straightforward and obvious. As their mission statement declares, they work for non-violent advocacy for social justice through activism, education and speaking out to promote loving and equitable treatment to all members of the diverse communities in which its members live and work. This is the most developed characteristic of the group. The next most developed would be the practice of the group. As I’ve discussed in previous sections and chapters, the on-line arm of this group serves as an information clearinghouse and a space for members to share upcoming actions. Teachers help each other solve problems by offering words of encouragement and sharing materials. Each member is an expert in his
or her way, and each member of the group benefits from each member’s expertise at different moments in time. The most underdeveloped characteristic of this group, as defined by Wenger, is “community”, as the group is working on developing its structural issues; roles people play, etc. As is evidenced in the data presented in chapter four, the group is still young and still working out its kinks. While there is a smaller core of more active members working on figuring out such logistical issues, the entire group, I believe, still functions well as a Community of Practice. After all, Wenger and his colleagues (2002) have claimed that each member of a CoP has different motivations for belonging. The main goal is proving a space of support and growth for members.

Some people participate because they care about the domain and want to see it developed. Others are drawn by the value of having a community…Other members simply want to learn about the practice…what tools work well, what lessons have been learned by master practitioners. The community is an opportunity to learn new techniques and approaches in their personal desire to perfect their craft. (Wenger, et al. 2000, p. 44)

Each teacher in this study shared the reasons for which they participate in the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice. While each member of the group may call on the community to satisfy different needs, the common thread is support, as they work to extend their activist work into their classrooms. When teachers are allowed and encouraged to exchange ideas and dialogue about the inherent struggles of teaching critically, they are able to learn from each other and not only find strength and solidarity, but hone their craft as well.
Benefits and Limitations to This Model. The teachers who participated in this study all agree that Arizona Teachers for Justice has been a valuable space that has helped keep them abreast of various actions and current research and has also provided a space where they can share their challenges and triumphs and work to become better teachers. While groups such as Arizona Teachers for Justice serve many different needs to many different people at many different times, they aren’t always successful in helping keep teachers in the classroom. Montaño and Burstein (2006) provided an example of how support systems of like-minded teacher activists don’t always keep teachers in the classroom. In their study on Chicana teachers and how their support groups helped sustain them, the participants in this study felt “having colleagues or peers who shared the same teaching philosophy was the most important connection” (p. 178). However, the teachers in this group still left teaching and only one of the twelve participants was still active in community activism.

Similarly, Arizona Teachers for Justice is not a panacea. One of the members of the group with whom I spoke was beginning to question whether or not she wanted to stay in the classroom. The last time I spoke to Emilia, she had decided to stay in the classroom, in a charter school, for now, but she is leery and is keeping herself more open to possibilities outside of the classroom. She says that this past year has been very challenging, and when her only ally at her school decided to leave, Emilia decided she needed to go, too. When I asked her whether her decision to stay or go had been influenced at all by her membership to Arizona Teachers for Justice, she said it helped her find some other teaching possibilities, but also helped her find some other avenues to consider. She is thinking of becoming more active in organizing work and community
activism because of connections she is making through the group. This leads me to wonder, like Montaño and Burstein (2006), if this group will be able to truly sustain its members for the long haul. The group is only three years old and therefore too young yet to really know how effective it will be. This is a thread of inquiry I hope to follow in the future.

**Implications and Recommendations**

This study joins others in its attempt to understand the coping mechanisms of teachers who are faced with increased controls over their practice (See Goodson, 1992; McNeil, 1988, 2000a & 2000b; Picower, 2011) in an effort to develop policies to help keep these teachers from leaving the classroom (See Nieto, 2003; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Eklund, 2009; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009; Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). Like other studies, it examines the development of networks of support inside and outside the school walls in an effort to understand how teacher preparation programs should prepare socially just teachers (See Montaño, T., López-Torres, L., DeLissovoy, N. Pacheco, M., & Stillman, J., 2002; Quartz, K. H. & TEP Research Group, 2003; Picower, 2011). This study’s uniqueness, however, lies in its exploration of social justice activist educators in the state of Arizona who participate in a justice oriented teacher network (Ritchie, 2012) and push ahead despite the pressures and inequalities exacerbated by neoliberalism and neoconservativism. By sharing the personal narratives of these teachers with the larger research and policy making community, I hope to make this struggle more personal and to contribute to the larger discussion about how policy makers and teacher educators can better support and sustain social justice activist educators across the country.
Teachers in the state of Arizona face numerous unjust laws and polices and teachers who are dedicated to social justice and equitable pedagogies must navigate a complex landscape if they are to remain true to their convictions. The reality is, however, that more states are beginning to pass legislation similar to SB1070, HB 2281 and Arizona Prop 203. Teachers who are fighting in other parts of the country need to know they are not alone. They need to know that there are possibilities and that groups like Arizona Teachers for Justice, can help support and sustain both their teacher selves and their activist selves. Luckily, many such teacher activist groups are emerging across the country. Some of these groups include the New York Collective of Radical Educators, Teachers for Social Justice (Chicago), and Teachers 4 Social Justice (San Francisco). And even more recently, another Facebook group, like Arizona Teachers for Justice, called the Badass Teachers Association, has emerged and is quickly gaining members and media attention. As I watch the threads of discussion and stories being shared on this page, it is clear to me that teachers all over the country are angry and getting active, but they are still afraid. It is exciting and encouraging to see a group like this gaining critical mass. It is a testament to the power teachers can wield when banded together and gives me hope that policy makers will begin to listen to these activist teachers.

This study is very personal. It lies at the heart of why I chose to leave my students, colleagues and classroom to write a dissertation and earn a doctorate. I was one of these social justice activist educators who were faced with frustrating policies that had been made by men and women who had never been in a classroom. I was in the trenches and I knew the impact legislation like No Child Left Behind had on my students. I saw the fall out; the collateral damage that occurred as the outcomes of globalization were
gaining more and more ground in the realm of education. I felt bombarded and helpless. I
decided I wanted to take the steps to gain the credentials so policy makers would listen to
me: a policy scholar and activist teacher. Time has passed and I realize I have a long way
to go to get policy makers to listen. I am hopeful, however, that this dissertation can help
pave the way by bringing the voices of reflective, dedicated, social justice activist
educators to the discussion. Furthermore, as groups like Arizona Teachers for Justice are
becoming more common, or at least more visible, my hope is that policy makers begin to
recognize the tenacity and power groups like these have the potential to hold.

**Recommendations for practice.** This study is personal on another level. As I
begin my career as a teacher educator, I am passionate about how we can create teacher
preparation programs that more effectively prepare teachers for social justice and
activism. As chapter two illustrated, teacher preparation programs that stress the
importance of socially just pedagogy are crucial if we hope to accomplish educational
reform that will address the glaring inequalities perpetuated by globalization and its
related factors and forces. However, socially just teachers cannot just learn the lingo or
claim to foster conscientization (Freire, 1970/1986), they must be reflective, take the
theories they learn in the classroom and make them real by engaging in activism. The
teachers in this study do just that. These teachers can help us create better teacher
preparation programs by sharing their knowledge and providing pre-service teachers a
realistic glimpse into what it means to be a social justice activist educator. Honesty and
candidness are incredibly important in any efforts to developing any radical teacher
education programs. As mentioned in chapter two, Herbert Kohl (2002/2003) declared
that any radical teacher education program “has to consider the tension between
developing critical, perceptive, skilled, and motivated new activist teachers and the grim realities and struggles they will likely face” (p. 5) and prepare these teachers “to be working against the grain and be willing to see themselves as agents of change” (p. 5). The narratives shared in this dissertation give voice to these realities and must be shared with pre-service teachers so they can better prepare for the grim realities they face as educators.

Another implication of this study for teacher preparation programs echoes the work of Montaño, López-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, and Stillman (2002) and Weiler and Maher (2002). These scholars contend that if we are to create and nurture teacher activists, programs must allow for activist experiences that allow “teachers to acquire the skills, disposition, and political consciousness necessary to engage in social and political action” (Montaño, et al., 2002, p. 265). By adding this element of activism to teacher preparation programs, future teachers learn how to recognize the larger forces that are at work and gain not only more tools with which to navigate the realities of current school policies but also activist skills so they can go out to fight for their students and their profession (Sachs, 2000 & 2003).

Moreover, progressive programs educating prospective teachers need to include both models of progressive pedagogy and curriculum and courses exploring the historical and contemporary politics of education, to give prospective teachers tools of analysis and action. (Maher & Weiler, 2002/2003, p. 2)

Communities of Practice, like Arizona Teachers for Justice help inform its members about various actions. As I explained earlier, the group serves as a clearinghouse for information that keeps its members abreast of current events and
current actions. It helps unify its members by providing them the space to share their struggles and gather support for actions. Pre-service teachers who are dedicated to socially just pedagogies, just like one of the participants in this study, Mary, can be encouraged to join groups such as Arizona Teachers for Justice so they can develop their activism skills alongside their teaching skills.

**Future Research Directions**

As any research endeavor should, this study has opened up many new questions and avenues for future research. As I stated early in this dissertation, this study points out a gap in the literature surrounding the support of activist teachers; the consideration of socialization and the impact of a teacher’s past experiences, identity, and ideologies. While I set out to address this gap at the beginning, as my research developed into what has been reported above, sociological considerations feel to the wayside. I hope to return to the data and examine the socialization and backgrounds of social justice activist educators in greater depth. While the participants of this study did reflect on the influences that brought them to activism, deeper connections failed to be made. As I develop my research agenda in upcoming months and years, I see this as a valuable direction to explore.

As I mentioned in chapter three, this study focused on a relatively small number of group members. Time and space constraints made it difficult to recruit more participants. The group, Arizona Teachers for Justice has almost sixty members and continues to grow. The group serves many different teachers who work in many different settings. Are there particular grade levels or teaching contexts that draw social justice activist educators? Are younger teachers more likely to be open about their activism than
their older colleagues? I hope to add more participants as I continue to develop this work so that I may better understand who these teachers are, what social justice activism looks like and how this group functions as a Community of Practice. Furthermore, how do similar groups function? As a member of the growing, online group, The Badass Teachers Association, I hope to work with my fellow activist scholars to better support the group’s members by further researching the effectiveness of these sorts of Communities of Practice.

I would also like to examine the element of fear that was so dominant in the narratives of these teachers. I can imagine applying a Foucauldian lens to this data in an effort to better understand the fear these teachers feel. Furthermore, why does this fear manifest itself even when teachers claim they have no fear? Is fear so imbedded in the teaching profession that teachers are unable to recognize it? How can we call out these fears and, by naming it, end it?

Finally, because the group, Arizona Teachers for Justice is a relatively young community, I hope to maintain contact with the members and watch if and how it grows. I have hope that groups such as this will continue to gather membership and build strength through solidarity.

**Closing Statement**

As I stated earlier, this study was very personal. I am a social justice activist educator who ended up leaving the classroom in an effort to help inform and make policy. It is my firm belief that policy makers have an ethical obligation to attend to the voices of those who are affected by the policies they create. Unfortunately, that rarely happens, particularly when it comes to education policy. Teaching has historically been a
feminized and thus depreciated profession. The current climate of sweeping neoliberal
and neoconservative reforms that devalue not only teachers, but their students as well, is
creating an army of angry teachers, students, parents and education advocates. In
Arizona, teachers and the families and communities with whom they work are facing
even greater attacks on their humanness with racist and dehumanizing laws and policies. I
knew, as an activist teacher and scholar, my work needed to address these issues in an
effort to better understand so that I can help make change.

As I imagined how my work could make an impact on the education world, I
realized I wanted the teachers to be heard. As I began to sit with the teachers who
participated in this study it became clear that they were hungry for someone to listen and
to share in their anger and hopefulness. Our one hour interviews turned into two, three,
and sometimes four hour conversations about the work they do, the fears they have, and
the love for their students and communities that makes the risk all worthwhile.

In many ways, these teachers confirmed my hunches about teaching in the state of
Arizona. They spoke of instances where they were singled out for being activists and they
spoke about how difficult it was to find like-minded, supportive colleagues within their
school’s walls. They exuded relief and excitement when they spoke of how they found
allies in Arizona Teachers for Justice. It was exhilarating to watch their faces and share in
the moments of hurt and hopefulness; moments that we had in common as social justice
activist educators.

In writing this dissertation, I sought to provide a space for members of the group,
Arizona Teachers for Justice, to open up and share their stories about how they cope in a
state that seems to be constantly attacking its residents. Each of these teachers is unique.
Each one feels called to teaching and comes to his or her activism for different reasons, but they are unified in their passion. I sought understanding about why and how they keep fighting when the struggle seems nothing but endless. These teachers taught me that fighting is half the fun and when working in solidarity with other like-minded teachers, it doesn’t seem like such a struggle. They taught me that fear is ever present, but it takes courage to continue the fight, because, as Freire (2005) said, “there may never be courage without fear” (p. 76).
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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
To: Elizabeth Swadener
   EDUCATION

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
      Soc Beh IRB

Date: 10/30/2012

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 10/30/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1210008447

Study Title: Sustaining and Supporting Activist Teachers in Arizona

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.
CONSENT FORM
Sustaining and Supporting Activist Teachers in Arizona

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

RESEARCHERS
Kimberly A. Eversman has invited your participation in a research study.

STUDY PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to examine how a particular group of activist educators in the state of Arizona find ways to navigate education policy tensions and work to support each other in both the educative and the activist work in which its members engage. This is an important topic to explore if we are to better understand how to recruit social justice activist educators to the education profession in the first place. Second, this work will help document how these teachers work to navigate the pressures; above and beyond the usual pressures of high-stakes testing, standardization, and narrowing curricula; in a state that is particularly hostile to social justice activist educators. In this way, we can better understand how to prepare future educators to face the tensions they will encounter in the classroom and increase teacher retention.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
If you decide to participate, then you will join a study, which involves meeting with me for an individual interview that will be digitally recorded. Later, I will ask all participants to meet as a group to participate in one large group interview that will also be digitally recorded. You are allowed to refuse to answer any question or drop out of the study at any time.

If you say YES, your first interview will last approximately 1-2 hours. The group interview will last between 2-2.5 hours. You will have the choice as to where we meet for your individual interview and the group interview will be held at a central location for all participants. Approximately 9 subjects will be participating in this study.

RISKS
There are no known risks from taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS
Although there may be no direct benefits to you, your participation will help researchers and teachers better understand how to support teachers, like yourself, in their social justice and activism work.

CONFIDENTIALITY
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, you will be asked to refrain from using your name, the names of colleagues, or the name of your school during the interviews and I will only use pseudonyms in any reports, publications, or presentations. All digital copies of the interviews will be kept on a password-protected computer in my locked office. Any hard copies of any identifying information will be kept in a locked file cabinet. After the study is over, all data will
be destroyed. If you chose to participate in the focus group portion of this study, it should be known that due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is ok for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. If you do withdraw, any information previously gathered will immediately be destroyed. However, if you decide to participate in the individual interview, but not the focus group interview, and you would still like the information from your individual interview used in the study, I will not destroy your information.

**COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

There is no payment for your participation in the study.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

Any questions you have concerning the research study or your participation in the study, before or after your consent, will be answered by:

Kimberly Eversman: 480-965-9026; 507-273-2954 (cell) or Kimberly.Eversman@asu.edu
Elizabeth Swadener: 480-965-1452; 480-232-1253 (cell), or Beth.Swadener@asu.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk; you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at 480-965 6788.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

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**INVESTIGATOR’S STATEMENT**

"I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature. These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by Arizona State University to the Office for Human Research Protections to protect the rights of human subjects. I have provided (offered) the subject/participant a copy of this signed consent document."

Signature of Investigator ___________________________ Date __________________