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 Final Reflection
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Final Service Learning Reflection Question 1

Chapter four in the book is titled “Conceptual Foundations.” In Chapter four of *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, the two most important themes are social justice and oppression. I choose social justice as an important theme because the book defines the term and how it relates to the school system very well. As defined by the book, “Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (Hardiman, pg. 21). Many people refer to this as equity versus equality. Equality is the same distribution for everyone, but equity means that lower performing schools might need some extra resources than everyone else. This is often the case for them to increase their performance. Both have the same goal, an equal chance for every student to succeed. As you can see, this is very relevant to education. In class we have looked at how schools in the same district can have few resources, while some schools are overflowing with resources. When I am a teacher, I will try my best to make up for resources that we might not have in the classroom. I will fight to make schools equitable. I will also make sure that resources in the classroom are evenly distributed for all my students, and aim to create an even playing field. A teacher can also do this by expecting the same performance from all their students. A teacher also should not single out a student because of his or her race. The theme of social justice, or lack of social justice, is evident at the Boys and Girls Club. They do not have the same resources as other schools. This is due to the lack of funding. This continues a very viscous cycle. The best way to combat this is to put in politicians that care about education. They will be able to have a real say about social justice in the education system. We even have the presidential election coming up, so this is definitely something people should be looking for in a presidential candidate. The theme of oppression is also evident in this chapter. I choose this theme because it is important to be aware of the many types of oppression and how it continues in our country. Racism is not the only example of oppression. Some other examples of oppression are classism, sexism, ageism, and much more. This is important in education because oppression is fueling the achievement gap. This is the opposite of social justice, and it can happen on many levels, including individual or institutional. This can be a difficult subject to fix, and blaming others does not always help the issue. However I would like to combat this in my own classroom by looking at it with a social justice lens. This means actively making sure that everyone has an equal chance to succeed, and holding high standards of academic success for all the students. The more we move towards social justice, the more we move away from oppression. This movement is definitely what all the students at the Boys and Girls Club in Opelika need. While I was there, I complimented them on their academic performance. Even if it was just while doing homework or playing with flashcards, I wanted them to all know how talented they are. I think some of them are definitely overlooked at school. Like I mentioned in a previous reflection, “We had one girl who was very upset because it took her awhile to complete her homework and she felt ‘dumb’” (Reflection 1, p. 4). Maybe she is embarrassed because something was said in school about her performance time. I never want any of my students to feel that way. The best thing that we can do is combat oppression in order to aim for social justice. Having equity in schools will benefit the students so much. They will be able to equally compete with other students in high performing schools. After all, the next generation needs to be educated leaders.

Question 2

Oppression is very common in our world and a lot of times it often goes unnoticed. Oppression runs deep. The book says that, "...oppression is both intentional and unintentional" (Hardiman, pg. 27). A sly comment about social class or a preconceived judgment about a group of people is becoming more common in our world. This is something that needs to be stopped. We cannot and should not continue this viscous cycle anymore. My experiences at my service-learning site have helped me recognize how common oppression is and how much privilege I have. Things that were very common to me growing up are not always the same for the kids at the Boys and Girls Club in Opelika. One example is their gym equipment. Growing up, I had the privilege of knowing that all the basketballs and soccer balls would be filled with air and ready to play with. However at the Boys and Girls Club in Opelika, none of the balls are completely filled with air. This is definitely something that is so simple that I always took for granted. My elementary school gym was also always filled with fun and exciting things to play with. This is not something that the kids at the Boys and Girls Club in Opelika get to enjoy. It is definitely something I wish that they could enjoy. As a kid there, it gets tiring always playing kickball because that's the only good ball the club has. Many of the students don't want to play it anymore. Another example is their lack of pencils and pens. When it comes time for power hour, the kids are scrambling to try to find a pencil to do their homework. How can teachers expect them to do multiplication every night when they can't even find a good pencil to use? Typically, the kids have to share the couple of pencils that the club has stored away. It is definitely humbling noticing these types of things. This topic needs to be talked about more in order to try to combat this issue.

This topic can be difficult to talk about and approach. At first, I wanted to bring them new basketball and soccer balls. However, I didn't know if it would be appropriate for me to. We have also talked about in class how throwing money at something isn't going to fix the fundamental problem anyway. For the past couple of weeks, I have tried to find alternative games to play. For example, they have a small soccer goal. However, they do not use it for soccer because it is broken and has holes in the net. For this reason, I have repurposed the goal. It is now a "tent." They were all so excited and curious about this. While some of the girls at the club and I play camping with the old goal and we even tell spooky stories in the pretend tent, others would come up and wonder what were doing. This is also true with their board games. Many are broken or missing pieces. Like I mentioned before, "The [Candy Land] board was torn in half and so it was taped together. There were also pieces missing, but we were innovative and used other small objects as our pawns" (Reflection 1, p. 4). The students and I would either come up with our own pieces or we come up with a whole new game when we came across this problem. It is really fun and it encourages them to think outside the box. We have come up with some very creative games. By not calling a lot of attention to what they have or don't have, it makes feel more comfortable. I don't want them to worry about these types of things. That is why it is so important to address this issue in a proper manner.

In order to lead to a meaningful change, those who are privileged need to have some sort of humbling experience. For example, seeing something so simple like not having a good ball to play with or a sharpened pencil to write with. These humbling experiences stay with you. They will affect how you think, act and speak. You will want the same opportunities for others, like you had for yourself. You will stop taking things for granted that shouldn't be. You will have a different outlook on life and the people in it. I think that the first thing to do is to realize that oppression is a problem. After one has identified that, they are ready to start to try to fight it in

their everyday life. It truly is something that you should be conscious about. I am grateful to have had this amazing and humbling experience. It will help so much in my own classroom.

Question 3

Public policy influences the students at my service-learning site. I think the biggest public policy that negatively influences the Boys and Girls Club in Opelika is property tax. Property taxes are the majority of funding for public education. With this being said, when you have a lower income area they are receiving less funding than those in higher income areas. As we have seen in class, this is true even within the same district. How are they supposed to compete with other schools when they lack fundamental resources? We have also talked about in class how a lot of schools in lower income communities have damage to the school that they next to fix first before they can spend the funding on new textbooks or other important resources. In my first reflection I talked about some statistics of one of the schools that funnels into the Boys and Girls Club. It says, "I read that there are 386 students there, as well as an 87% minority enrollment. I also read that it has one of the largest percentages of students eligible for free lunch in Alabama" (Reflection 1, p. 1). This facility was very run down. It lacked important resources. I think that it especially lacked workers. I don't know how they get through the days when they don't have more volunteers in. The director was also so put up with all the behavioral issues, that by the end of my time there, the director was not there any more. They were always having people come in and inspect the club. As I mentioned in the earlier question, the facility lacked resources like balls and pencils. The board games were all ripped up and torn. The facility was also always dirty. There was food and trash everywhere. There were also some issues with the bathrooms. Fundamental things like that should be fixed. These things directly affect the children there. This shows that class greatly effects one's education. One's class rank is determined at birth. The book says, "Class standing has a significant impact on chances for educational achievement" (Matsios, pg. 155). Clearly, we should put improve the way that public schools are funded.

Another policy that affects the students at the Boys and Girls Club is the Zero Tolerance rule. This means that you are expelled, without a warning first, on behavioral issues. The kids at the club love to play fight. We got on to them a lot there because of this. We didn't want them to play fight because we didn't want to encourage fighting. Fighting is clearly never the answer, however polices like the Zero Tolerance policy are limiting these kids. Also with this policy, teachers and administrators don't look at the reason why the incident happened. This is not a real solution for the problem that the child is facing. Also under this policy, the student is expelled even if they were defending themselves. Clearly, this system wasn't well thought out. While violence and disruption in schools should not be tolerated, there are better options that help fix the true problem at hand rather than just covering it up and expelling the student. For example, a teacher keeps writing up one of the students at the Boys and Girls Club in Opelika. The note says that the student was disruptive in class. Instead of going straight to discipline, the teacher should try to talk out this issue with the student. There could be something going on at home, with a friend, or something else at school. We truly never know. Writing up this student builds a barrier between the teacher and student. The student might not feel comfortable approaching the teacher on important issues that affect the student's academic achievement. This policy goes hand in hand with the school to prison pipeline statistics. When students continue to get this harsh punishment, they are left with nothing else but being stuck in criminal justice systems. This is not what we want for our students. However by implementing strict discipline, this can happen. The school to prison pipeline is much more popular in low-income areas. This is definitely something that I will be aware of in my own classroom. I hope that we can all agree that while students should be held to high standards and expectations, we cannot expel a student for a small mistake. However if the mistakes cannot be corrected, than discipline should increase each time.

Works Cited

Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumenfeld, Carmelita (Rosie) Castañeda, Heather W. Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, and Ximena Zúñiga. *Readings For Diversity and Social Justice*. New York :Routledge Taylor & Franacis Group, 2013.