



Social Justice: Approaches to Student Learning¹

with David J. Smith, JD, MS

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Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM EST (Q&A 2:30 -3:00 PM EST)

[Link to Webinar](#)

Understanding Social Justice

Though many definitions of social justice exist, most of them share a set of core concerns. The commonalities include, but are not limited to: concern for human rights and dignity; civic responsibility; access to fair and democratic institutions; freedom from discriminatory treatment; access to forms of social support and opportunity; legal, political, economic, and social equality.² Political theorists John Rawls and David Miller are amongst the most prominent voices in the literature on social justice. Miller's theory, *Principles of Social Justice* (2003), posits that satisfying needs, proportionally rewarding superior performance, and maintaining equality amongst citizens are crucial to achieving justice. Rawls' theory, *Justice as Fairness* (2003), emphasizes the protection of equal access to rights, freedoms, and opportunities as well as the importance of caring for society's least advantaged members.³ Social justice derives its complexity from both theory and practice. While one individual might strive to promote justice through social work with disadvantaged families, another might engage in nonviolent protests and demonstrations in order to support just social change. The diversity of ideas and practices associated with social justice makes sustained dialogue around the topic increasingly important for those seeking to support positive societal change.

Connecting Education and Social Justice

The intersection between social justice and education is multifaceted and complex, to say the least. Theories like the ones referenced above indicate that access to quality education is a human right and thus an essential component of social justice. However, policymakers and elected officials aren't the only ones responsible for the protection and promotion of the right to education. Teachers, educators, mentors, and even students are also responsible for creating spaces that promote deep learning and social justice. As change agents, these actors are uniquely

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² "The Definition of Social Justice" by Georgianna Dolan-Reilly
<http://www.socialjusticesolutions.org/2013/01/15/the-definition-of-social-justice/>

³ "What is Social Justice?" by Matthew Robinson, PhD
<http://gis.appstate.edu/social-justice-and-human-rights/what-social-justice>



positioned to impart knowledge and exercise influence in a manner that can interrupt cycles of oppression and profoundly impact the lives of both young people and adults. Methods that promote social justice within and beyond the classroom challenge people to seek knowledge, think critically, and engage others with authenticity and openness.⁴ Educational approaches that value diversity, promote effective communication, and cultivate mutual understanding are key to building social justice within and between communities and cultures.⁵

Advancing Social Justice – Innovation and Application

Those that are dedicated to creating social change and justice find themselves continuously challenged by the inequalities and injustices that persist in our society and around the world. Though globalization has certainly played a role in exacerbating inequalities, it has also provided us with tools and methods of communication that can be used to advance peace and justice. Perseverance and innovation are key to overcoming the challenges created by inequity and oppression. Examples of such innovation are abundant within our communities, organizations, and institutions. The complex issues that surround us, however, make dialogue and collaborative engagement imperative to building equality and advancing social justice.

Sources/Further Reading

“Creating Classrooms for Social Justice” by Tabitha Dell’Angelo

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/creating-classrooms-for-social-justice-tabitha-dellangelo>

“The Definition of Social Justice” by Georgianna Dolan-Reilly

<http://www.socialjusticesolutions.org/2013/01/15/the-definition-of-social-justice/>

“Introduction: Creating Classrooms for Equity and Social Justice” by Teachers for Social Justice (Rethinking Schools Magazine)

<http://www.rethinkingschools.org/static/publication/roc1/Intro.pdf>

*see also <http://www.teachersforjustice.org/>

“What is Social Justice?” by Matthew Robinson, PhD

<http://gjs.appstate.edu/social-justice-and-human-rights/what-social-justice>

“What does it mean to teach for social justice?” by Pat Russo

http://www.oswego.edu/~prusso1/Russos_what_does_it_mean_to_teach_for_s.htm

Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center

⁴ “Introduction: Creating Classrooms for Equity and Social Justice.”

<http://www.rethinkingschools.org/static/publication/roc1/Intro.pdf>

⁵ “What does it mean to teach for social justice?” by Pat Russo

http://www.oswego.edu/~prusso1/Russos_what_does_it_mean_to_teach_for_s.htm



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