The “Building Tasks” of Critical History:
Structuring Social Studies for Social Justice

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Using research in curriculum studies, New Literacy Studies, and discourse analysis, the author examines two illustrative cases of social studies teachers who actively structure their lesson plans with the aim of promoting social justice education. This study finds that these teachers seek to encourage students to question social and economic relations by “building” their curricula in specific ways.

Introduction

In order to better understand the role that curricular structure plays in social justice-oriented social studies classrooms, this study undertakes an analysis of two case lesson plans authored by social studies teachers who actively seek to engage issues of equality and justice in their teaching. I begin here with a brief discussion about how social studies for social justice has been conceptualized in previous research. I then explain the design of this study, including a discussion of Gee’s (2005) “building tasks” of language—essentially operationalizing a form of discourse analysis. To methodologically justify the two cases in this study, I further discuss the literature surrounding lesson plan analyses, making the argument that lesson plans actually represent a semiotic marker of teacher practice. The bulk of the lesson plan analysis then follows as I take up two illustrative cases taken from the social justice oriented publication Rethinking Schools, explaining how these teachers structure their classroom environments in particular ways vis-à-vis their lesson plans.

Social Studies for Social Justice

Scholarship has highlighted the importance of incorporating social justice issues into social studies instruction (e.g., Lewis, 2001; Rierson & Duty, 2003; Ross, 1998). Such an approach has the value of challenging students’ self-centeredness (Parker, 2005) and developing students’ sense of social responsibility and social action (Wade, 2001). This incorporation often revolves around the core concept of social equality and embraces the idea that schools and social studies classrooms, in particular, are sites where this concept can be fostered (Bigelow, 1990; Segall, 1999). It follows then that social studies for social justice actively seeks to recognize the diversity of the world and the complexities associated with issues of racism, sexism, class oppression, and other forms of inequality (Bigelow, 1999; Hursh, 1997). It is also a conception of the social studies that recognizes a commitment to developing culturally relevant practices so that the needs of students of color are met (Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Social studies for social justice also supports the continuing development of critical literacy in students (Hursh & Ross, 2000). In this conception, social studies teachers and students are conceived as agents of transformation in classrooms, schools, and communities (Marker, 2000) where “teachers and students…raise questions of whose knowledge is in the curriculum and how power and equality are maintained” and where “[s]tudents begin to
learn how to develop questions and gather information in ways that enable them not only to better understand society but also to change it” (Hursh & Ross, 2000, p. 10). Social studies for social justice also recalls Segall’s (1999) suggestion of critical history education and the concept of creating:

[A] pedagogical environment in which the very foundations of history as a discipline are called into question; a space in which history…is shaken—its habitual meanings and ways of making meaning…exposed as custom and the prescribed is unsettled by a shift into the elsewhere of the possible. (p. 371)

Thus, in addition to working toward equality inside and outside of the classroom, social studies for social justice also challenges the hegemonic, status quo norms of historical knowledge, and it does so with visionary and pedagogic explorations into the edges of the possible (Au, 2009).

**Study Design and Methodology**

This study focuses on two illustrative cases (Stake, 2000) of social studies lessons specifically structured to promote social justice. These two cases were selected according to three criteria: (1) They are published in an established source for curricula; (2) they are written by classroom teachers who have put these curricula into practice in their own classrooms, and (3) the curricula promote social critique, social equality, or other values associated with social justice education. One case for analysis will be the “The Organic Goodie Simulation” (Bigelow & Diamond, 2007), an in-class simulation that explores labor relations in the context of capitalist competition. The other case for analysis will be the “Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention” (Peterson, 2001), a role play that takes a critical look at whose voices and interests were included in the founding of the United States.

Methodologically, this study makes use of discourse analysis. In Gee’s (2005) conception of discourse analysis, people use language to operationalize certain “building tasks” in order to express meaning, ideology, values, and other aspects of our identities in a given situation. According to Gee, the building tasks of language are as follows:

- **Significance**: We use language to make things significant (to give them meaning or value) in certain ways, to build significance. (p. 11)

- **Activities**: We use language to get recognized as engaging in a certain sort of activity, that is, to build an activity here-and-now…When I act I have to use language to make clear to others what it is I take myself to be doing. (p. 11)

- **Identities**: We use language to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role, that is, to build an identity here-and-now. (p. 11)

- **Relationships**: We use language to signal what sort of relationship we have, want to have, or are trying to have with our listener(s), reader(s), or other people, groups, or institutions about whom we are communicating; that is, we use language to build social relationships. (p. 12)

- **Politics** (the distribution of social goods): We use language to convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods, that is, to build a perspective on social goods…such as guilt and blame, legal responsibility or lack of it…bad or good motives. (p. 12)
Connections: We use language to render certain things connected or relevant (or not) to other things, that is, to build connections or relevance... Things are not always inherently connected or relevant to each other. Through language we have to make such connections. Even when things seem inherently connected or relevant to each other, I can use language to break or mitigate such connections. (pp. 12-13)

Sign Systems and Knowledge: We can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not, in given situations, that is to build privilege or prestige for one sign system or knowledge claim over another. (p. 13)

Gee’s building tasks of language provide a general framework within which various aspects of social justice social studies curricula can be understood.

Lesson Plans as Non-Markers or Markers of Teacher Practice?

One of the underlying arguments of this study is that the lesson plan can communicate real and useful representations of classroom practice. It is important to recognize, however, that this argument has long been disputed within the field of education (Kagan & Tippins, 1992). A significant body of literature effectively discredits formal lesson plans as useful instruments for teachers and, by extension, challenges their use in teacher education. For instance, research has shown that experienced teachers do not rely on the type of detailed lesson plans that are regularly required as necessary parts of teacher education programs (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Clark & Yinger, 1979). Others have found that teachers tend to make loose notes or outlines of information to cover in lessons while doing the majority of their planning in their heads, not formally on paper (McCutcheon, 1982; Morine-Dershimer, 1979), and even then, these notes can be non-linear and contradictory to the models taught in schools of education (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Clark & Yinger, 1987). Kagan and Tippins (1992) arrive at similar conclusions regarding traditional lesson plans in their research with pre-service teachers and advocate the definition of lesson plans as “lists of major instructional procedures” instead of the linear progressions associated with traditional lesson planning.

While it may hold true that mechanistic lesson designs are often thrown out in the pragmatic context of classroom application, despite the above research, I would like to argue that, given an orientation offered by the field of New Literacy Studies (Gee, 2005, 2008; Street, 2001) in combination with other criteria, lesson plans can represent real classroom practices-in-use, both theoretically and pragmatically. New Literacy Studies, a body of research and theorizing that has grown tremendously in the last twenty years, posits that all literacies are, in fact, socially situated practices developed within specific contexts with specific aims, intentions, audiences, and social identities in mind (Gee, 2005, 2008). Through the lens of New Literacy Studies, lesson plans should thus be viewed as a specific literacy practice that, depending on the situation, communicates teacher intent, audience, and identity. Further, I would argue that such a vision of lesson plans does not, in fact, contradict earlier claims that teachers do not make use of them in their practice.

A view from within New Literacy Studies explains the variability found in lesson plan research. For example, in instances where teachers have been found to make simple notes to themselves or mainly make plans in their heads (e.g., see McCutcheon, 1982), New Literacy Studies raises questions of how such lesson planning relates to these teachers’ practices and their intended audiences. In such instances, individual teachers are their own audience, and their lesson plans therefore do
not need to be fully articulated. A similar claim can also be made regarding the research that finds a disconnect between the lesson plan models taught in schools of education and the models (or lack of models) that teachers use once they enter their classrooms (e.g., see Kagan & Tippins, 1992). As students in schools of education, teachers-in-training have specific identities they communicate through their writing: They are students in the field of education who are learning to teach. The purposes/aims (self reflection, communication with others) and audiences (cooperating teachers, other teachers-in-training, and school of education instructors/supervisors) for such written lesson plans are specific to their identities as “students” of teaching. Writing such lesson plans is one marker of being a teacher-in-training, and it is also part of the discourse of schools of education where written lesson plans hold specific value. However, once teachers-in-training become classroom teachers in their own right, moving from students to credentialed or certificated teachers, their identity shifts remarkably. They are no longer students in a school of education. Once in their own classrooms writing lesson plans for themselves, the purposes, audiences, and socially situated practices of the students-turned-teachers have changed, and, based on the research, it is clear that the literacy practices of lesson plan design change as well.

Finally, building upon the above importation of New Literacy Studies into the realm of lesson plan design, I would also like to call on the work of Linné (2001), who posits the lesson plan as a “pedagogic text.” Linné’s conception provides a viable framework for lesson plan analysis that looks at “the structures of lesson designs, the discursive pattern of the text, the narrative involved, and the message or moral reflected in the text” (p. 130). Further Linné’s (2001) framing offers that a “lesson is not a real lesson. It is, however, one way of getting close to the normative idea of what was expected to take place in the actual teaching process” (p. 135). Thus, lesson plans can be viewed as concrete, material plans of enactment that imply teacher conceptualization and pedagogical structure for that enactment, all framed within a normative ideal. Linné’s concept of the lesson as “pedagogic text,” stressing its normative functions and representation of reality, helps us theoretically reclaim the lesson plan as a material projection of classroom practice; therefore providing theoretical grounds for further study of lesson plans as semiotic markers of both teacher intent and practice.

Rethinking Schools: Lesson Plans in Practice

The idea that lesson plans represent pedagogic texts is particularly useful, but there is another compelling argument to be made in addition to Linné’s assertion. There are lesson plans that do exist, that have been published in resource guides and collections, and that have been conceived, practiced, and committed to paper by veteran teachers specifically for dissemination and use by audiences of other teachers. For instance, the lesson plans analyzed here were developed and written by teachers who have over 24 years of public K-12 classroom teaching experience and who craft original lesson designs into useful classroom resources. Additionally, the lessons analyzed here have been published by the journal Rethinking Schools, a non-profit, independent education journal founded in 1985 by a group of Milwaukee public school teachers. Editors of Rethinking Schools state that the journal is “committed to equity and to the vision that public education is central to the creation of a humane, caring, multiracial democracy” with a particular emphasis on “problems facing urban schools, particularly issues of race” and trying to “balance classroom practice and educational theory” (Rethinking Schools, 2004). It should also be noted that the editorial board of Rethinking Schools consists entirely of K-12 classroom teachers (active and former), and any teaching ideas published in their journals and collections are required to represent useful
lesson designs under the watchful peer review of the board of teachers:

We believe … that efforts at classroom transformation should grow from a common social and pedagogical vision that … strives toward what we call a social justice classroom. In such a social justice classroom, curriculum and classroom practice must be:

Grounded in the lives of our students … Critical…Multicultural, anti-bias, pro-justice … Participatory, experiential … Hopeful, joyful, kind, visionary … Activist … Academically rigorous … Culturally sensitive. (*Rethinking Schools*, 2003, pp. 1-5)

If we take the sales figures, the profiles of the authors, and the standards for publication offered by *Rethinking Schools* and combine them with the above theoretical framework of written lesson planning as a socially situated practice and as a pedagogic text, the lesson plans analyzed here are indeed normative reflections of social justice social studies classroom practice (Au, 2006) and therefore warrant study. (Disclosure: The author of this study has been a member of the *Rethinking Schools* editorial board since 2004.)

**Critical History and Lesson Design**

Both of the illustrative cases analyzed here, the “Organic Goodie Simulation” (Bigelow & Diamond, 2007) and “Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention: A Role Play” (Peterson, 2001), are organized on the page as step-by-step lesson plans. For reasons of economy of words and clarity, I have chosen to first provide a picture of each lesson for the reader and then follow with a more general analysis of the lesson plan using Gee’s (2005) building tasks as a guide.

**The Organic Goodie Simulation**

The first case for analysis, “The Organic Goodie Simulation” (Bigelow & Diamond, 2007), was developed by classroom teachers Bill Bigelow and Norm Diamond. The “Organic Goodie Simulation” lesson plan begins with the premise that all students and teachers are to be trapped in their classroom forever. Fortunately, the teacher has an Organic Goodie Machine which, with proper labor, produces the perfect food: organic goodies (no waste, no soil needed, no sunlight needed, and no emissions). Working on the machine for the teacher allows students to make money to buy goodies to live. Not working on the machine means starving. After explaining these relationships to the class, the teacher-owner asks for volunteers to work the machine. Generally, most, if not all, students want to work on the machine. The teacher-owner, however, only chooses half of the class to work. The other half remains unemployed. After separating the students into two large groups—employed and unemployed—the teacher displays and explains the “Organic Goodie Economy” (Bigelow & Diamond, 2007, p. 101) where workers earn a subsistence wage of $6/day (minus $1 to support the unemployed); the unemployed receive a small, unsustainable subsidy of $2/day, and the teacher-owner gets to consume $6/day worth of goodies while earning a surplus of $4 per worker and paying out $1 per unemployed.

If students complain about the inequity of this economy, the justification for the teacher-owner surplus lies in the simple fact that the teacher’s ownership of the machine “benefits” the whole group (e.g., “We” are lucky “we” have this machine so “we” can survive…). In broad strokes, then, the “Organic Goodie Simulation” lesson plan creates a three-tiered society in which half the students are workers, the other half are unemployed, and the teacher is the owner of the machine. Worker-students make enough money to survive producing organic goodies for the owner-teacher, while
unemployed students slowly starve on their portion of state-subsidized goodies.

The friction that drives the simulation is the owner-teacher’s goal to increase profits by any means necessary, and there are several techniques the owner-teacher can use to increase profits. The first technique is to start a wage battle between employed and unemployed students, firing any employee who does not take a wage cut and replacing him or her with someone from the ranks of the unemployed who are slowly starving and are willing to work for less than $6 a day. Having taught this lesson many times myself, I have found this technique to be alarmingly successful. Students, in their drive for individual self-preservation, have generally been quick to take lower pay than their peers (e.g., my personal record is driving wages down to less than $3 a day). Other techniques suggested in the lesson plan include (a) asking workers to repeat the phrase “I am a happy worker” and firing any who do not comply; (b) making derogatory comments about the unemployed students; (c) firing anyone who even mentions the word “union” or is disruptive in any way; (d) forcing workers to sign “yellow dog” contracts promising they’ll never join a union; (e) hiring a foreman, spy, or security guard for slightly higher pay than the workers; and (f) having unemployed students “die” of starvation at regular intervals (Bigelow & Diamond, 2007).

The teacher ultimately plays two contradictory roles. As the teacher-owner within the context of the simulation, the teacher wants to fight student-worker organization and promote selfish individualism at all costs. However, outside of the simulation, the teacher hopes for the students to successfully organize and perhaps collectively take the machine over. In the end, students may or may not be successful at taking over the Organic Goodie Machine from their teacher for a variety of reasons. Or, even if they do take it over, sometimes another student or small group of students simply reclaims the machine in their name alone and tries to force everyone else to work for the new owners instead. The closing of the lesson then revolves around students’ critical reflections on their experience, and questions are raised about its implication for the classroom community and society at large.

Using Gee’s (2005) building tasks to think through the lesson plan structure of the “Organic Goodie Simulation,” we can see the way in which Bigelow and Diamond (2007) build social justice into the social studies curriculum. The first is that of significance. In terms of the simulation itself, several things are immediately made significant to the students. There is a significant change in setting, that is, the simulation is built upon the idea that everyone is stuck in the classroom. The machine itself is made significant to everyone’s survival, and the teacher’s ownership of the machine, which simultaneously signals the students’ lack of ownership, is also made important. The Organic Goodie Economy is also made significant because it systematically sets the terms of the classroom social system.

From a functional perspective, the lesson plan itself provides the language signifying that certain activities are being undertaken in the class. In this case, throughout the lesson, language is used to signal to students the nature of the activity at hand. Students are framed into the simulation by the lesson plan’s set-up (change in environment). Language is also used to establish the rules or bounds of the activities. Identity and relationship building are signaled as well. Immediately, students take up the identity of being non-owners of the Organic Goodie Machine, and the teacher uses language to signify this relationship. Further, student identities are then divided into workers and non-workers, thus setting the grounds for the activity of student-worker competition (or organization). This again simultaneously implies a relationship between workers and non-workers. All the while, the teacher-owner uses
language to foster certain types of relationships (that of individual self-interest) amongst the students-workers, and the students-workers are having their own conversations about what the best strategies for their particular identities might in fact be.

*Politics*, or the distribution of social goods, abound in this lesson plan. The teacher, in the role of owner, uses his or her power to support the politics of greed, self-interest, and profit. Indeed, the tension that drives the whole simulation depends on how these politics are distributed amongst the group. The explicit presence of these politics in the simulation, however, also gives rise to their opposites in the consciousness of the students-workers, for as soon as they have to confront their own self-interest and ask questions about it within the simulation, they also have to think about the possibility of communal or group interests (as well as individual or group ownership of the machine).

The cumulative effect and intent of “The Organic Goodie Simulation” is perhaps most important, for it promotes certain connections and knowledge claims for students to consider. Within the immediate contextual of the simulation, students are forced to confront their own sense of individual self-preservation and weigh it against their sense of group preservation. Furthermore, at this level, students are also forced to confront their own power as individuals vs. their power as a group in the face of the oppressive owner of the Organic Goodie Machine. The central problematic quickly arises: Can students overcome their individual differences and take control of the machine, or will they fight each other and ultimately work toward assured mutual starvation? Additionally, within the context of the simulation the teacher-owner is consciously and maliciously as divisive as possible, keeping the students from uniting by any means necessary.

In these ways, the lesson plan requires that students consider certain connections: connections between themselves as individual workers or individual non-workers, connections between the workers and non-workers as distinct groups, and connections between themselves and the teacher-owner. Additionally, students are compelled to consider which knowledge claims should or should not be privileged. Are the knowledge claims of the teacher-owner, which privilege individual self-interest and resist organization and self-determination, to be challenged or accepted? Are the knowledge claims of their peers, who also may advocate acting only in self-interest, to be challenged or accepted? Are the knowledge claims of their peers who assert the need for solidarity amongst workers and non-workers valid or invalid? The simulation, as outlined in the lesson plan, is driven by how students respond as they consider these connections and knowledge claims.

As social justice educators, Bigelow and Diamond use the simulation as a vehicle to highlight the importance for students to critically reflect upon these issues of power and socio-economic relations in the real world. Thus, as students consider individual self-interest, competition, ownership, right to profit, collective organizing, teacher power, student power, classroom relations, and economic class relations within the simulation, they are also asked to consider the significance of these activities and their implications for their identities, relationships, politics, connections, and perspectives (knowledge claims) in their classroom as well as in society at large. Bigelow and Diamond’s lesson plan aims at structuring this learning experience to help students make a deeper connection to the world beyond the simulation and to get them to ask critical questions about power and human relations both inside and outside of the classroom.

**Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention**

The second illustrative case used for this analysis is the lesson plan “Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention” (Peterson, 2001). Bob Peterson, author of the lesson, has been an
elementary teacher in the US for over 25 years, and his role-play was developed for use with his public school 4th grade classroom. This role-play is built upon the questions: (a) “Who benefited most (and the least) from the American Revolution? (b) Who wrote and ratified the Constitution for the new nation? (c) Who benefited most (and least) from the Constitution?” (Peterson, 2001, p. 63). Structurally, this role-play is a mock United States Constitutional Convention with a twist: Groups who were not invited to the original U.S. Constitutional Convention are invited to this rethought one. Thus, the groups invited to the governmental negotiation table for this role-play not only consist of “Male Southern Plantation Owners” and “Northern Merchants and Bankers” (which represent the bulk of the actual, historical attendees) but also include “White Workers/Indentured Servants,” “Enslaved African Americans,” “Free African Americans,” “White Women,” and “Native Americans – Iroquois Nation” (pp. 66-69). In this lesson, students are broken into the seven above-named groups. Once there, they are asked to read about and understand their roles, as well as develop answers to two key questions regarding the new constitution: (1) “Should slavery and the slave trade be abolished, and should escaped slaves be returned to their owners?” and (2) “Who should be allowed to vote in our new nation, and especially what role should gender, race, and property ownership play in such a decision?” (Peterson, 2001, p. 65). After each group develops their respective positions on these two questions, the lesson plan requires one or two negotiators be selected from each group to travel to other groups in order to build alliances or determine who might be against them (and what their arguments might be). After the negotiating is completed, students return to their groups, and each group develops a speech to deliver to the Convention. As facilitator of the Convention, the teacher poses the first question regarding slavery, taking statements from each group and allowing for a debate to take place. Once the debate has continued for a while, the teacher-facilitator asks for groups to make formal proposals regarding the question of slavery. The same process is completed for the second question, and then the whole Convention votes. As is important with any role-play, once completed, students are asked to reflect both on their individual “performance” and also on the issues raised—in this case, issues of racism, sexism, and classism.

The Building Tasks of Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention

We can see all of Gee’s (2005) building tasks operating in Peterson’s lesson plan. Significance is embedded into the role-play itself in that the Constitutional Convention is of historical importance, and the question of who was and was not included in the drafting and ratification of the Constitution of the United States is also significant to any interrogation of U.S. history. This lesson plan also signals a set of activities in that students take part in meetings, deliberate on important issues, write speeches, deliver speeches, negotiate with different groups, debate different groups and their perspectives, and vote on constitutional issues. Further, this Constitutional Convention role-play simultaneously builds particular identities and relationships. Students are literally asked to take up specific historical social identities of groups of people who may or may not have been present at the original Constitutional Convention. In reading their roles and taking up the two important questions regarding the enslavement of Africans and women’s suffrage, students are also signaled as communicating specific relationships. For instance, taking up the identity of a “Male Southern Plantation Owner” automatically places one in a matrix of social relationships within the role-play, a matrix that includes both free and enslaved African Americans who would be in favor of ending the institution of slavery.
The interaction of identities and relationships in this role-play also implicate politics, or the distribution of social goods. Students, in their specific roles as well as from their own personal perspectives, are compelled to ask questions about the social goods such as race, sex, and class equality as these goods relate to the development and ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Further, students must consider how these good are distributed across time since the Constitution is still the central document for governance in the US. This raises an obvious question: Could such race, sex, and class inequalities in the founding of the country have an impact on similar social inequalities that we see today? Thus, the building tasks of connections and knowledge claims are folded into the lesson plan. This rethought U.S. Constitutional Convention also asks students to make historical and political connections they may not have made without participating in this particular educational experience, and it also challenges the privileging of the commonsense knowledge claim that the US was founded on notions of individual equality. Consequently, this role-play is an activity that highlights the significance of specific identities, relationships, politics, connections, and knowledge claims of an event that is central to the history of the United States.

Conclusions: Building Social Studies for Social Justice

Based on the above analysis, we can come to several conclusions. The first speaks to one of the central claims against lesson plan design and analysis. Cochran-Smith (1995) argues that lesson plans are invalid because they “imply that both planning for teaching and teaching itself are linear activities that proceed from a preplanned opening and move to a known and predetermined endpoint” (p. 496). True, the lesson plans included for analysis here are numbered and presented in a linear format. But we should be clear that these lesson plans hardly represent plodding, mechanistic designs. Rather, these lesson plans embody occasions of structured chaos so that while they are numbered and do indeed proceed from a “preplanned opening” to a “known and predetermined endpoint,” they allow for a range of acceptable outcomes in terms of form, content, and process. The lessons analyzed also challenge Cochran-Smith’s position that lesson plan linearity necessarily implies “static knowledge” or a “one-way conduit of learning.” Clearly, the world building that takes place through these social studies lesson designs depends on knowledge in motion and in a constant, dialectical relationship amongst students and between students and the teacher. Both lessons also build on the apparent unpredictability of student histories and perspectives to create meaning. The argument that linearity necessarily equals a bad lesson design falls flat when confronted with these linear yet very non-mechanistic lessons included in this study.

But the above point about lesson plan design is less significant than how these lessons structure social justice into the very curricular environments and learning experiences of students. The lesson plans examined here, as texts of social justice pedagogy in practice, build and rebuild particular types of worlds in the classroom. Arguably, constructing a world in the classroom is something all teachers do, but what distinguishes the worlds built by these pedagogic texts is their particular structuring around social justice and issues of power. In both examples, the educational activities are designed to make issues of social and economic inequality significant, as well as to compel students to ask significant questions about the human relations in and around these inequalities. Furthermore, in both lessons, students take up particular identities and their implicated relationships in order to interrogate these inequalities. This, in turn, allows for specific politics, for the specific social goods of collective responsibility, individual and group equality, and the critique of power to be distributed throughout each educational exper-
ience and reflected upon both historically and for contemporary times. Indeed, it might be argued that both lesson plans are designed to be vehicles to encourage students to make connections between their own experiences, the experiences of others, and the larger social structures that impinge on all of our lives. This is also an extension of politics. Finally, in calling attention to issues of power, both of these lessons support the knowledge claims of those who have been disenfranchised and disempowered by dominant social and economic relations. Such social studies social justice curricula recognize that classrooms function as parallel with and part of broader society. In doing so, these lessons serve as vehicles for students to critically question social relations as they exist historically, in their classrooms, in their lives, and in society at large.

References


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