A critical examination of K-2 professional learning policy: A discourse analysis of social justice
language

by

Courtney J. Hoffhines

B.S., Kansas State University, 2007
M.S., Emporia State University, 2011

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

Abstract

Today's teachers must navigate a complex system of policy and curriculum, while striving to accommodate increasingly diverse student demographics and complicated social landscapes. In recognition of the modern-day K-2 classroom, this research reviewed and analyzed educational policy language to identify and examine social justice concepts related to practitioners' professional roles. Evaluating policy content through careful policy analysis supports a review of professional expectations and learning in relation to the meaning of language and discourse within educational text. Critical discourse analysis methods were used to examine educational policy available through the Kansas State Department of Education. The researcher analyzed the language used to address concepts of social justice education, explored the presence and application of critical pedagogical concepts, as well as identified opportunities for professional expectations in relation to social justice education and professional learning.

Study findings, in alignment with core research concepts, were based in language connected to social justice education, use of critical pedagogy, as well as insights into professional learning through professional expectation. Findings include the communication of culturally responsive instructional practices, coded language indicating support for all learners, as well as the appearance of values through social justice education language and concepts. Findings also connected critical pedagogical concepts within demonstrations of Kansas values, tied to professional knowledge and practice. Finally, findings based in professional learning opportunities showed inferred social justice education practices and the integration of civic behaviors. Implications for practice are also discussed through the examination of overarching themes: policy, social justice education, and professional learning, demonstrating educational insights for practitioners and policymakers, as well as support for future research.

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Acknowledgements

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to both my family and my students. For my mom and my dad, thank you for all you have done to support and encourage me throughout my educational journey. You have sacrificed so that I may pursue my educational goals, always speaking the message of empowerment and hard work. To my family members who have listened to me get carried away with my research or learning, and to my sister who willingly watched my sweet dog so that I could work, thank you. I could not have found success in this journey without your willingness to engage and support me.

For my students, the past 14 years in the classroom with you has led me to a greater value for this world. Each of my students has allowed me to view life through a different set of eyes. You have each left a mark on my heart, and I relied on those marks to guide my passion for research based in social justice and the empowerment of educators. I know that I have missed opportunities to meet your needs and have been humbled by the love and trust I am met with each year by you, my students. I dedicate this work to you. May you one day know the power you have to impact this world.

Chapter One

Introduction

Today's K-12 system reflects society through the inclusion of wide-ranging cultural identities and social power structures (Khalil & Brown, 2015). With a largely homogenic teaching workforce at the helm of a heterogenic student population (Baily et al., 2014), analysis reveals structural inequity (Dover, 2009) and the reality of minoritized students performing at lower rates than their majority peers, as well as increased dropout rates and overidentification of behavioral issues (Shields, 2004).

Due to the noted disparity between teacher demographics and those of K-12 students, it is vital that educators "are not vehicles for prejudice, classism, and racism" (Khalil & Brown, 2015, p. 80). In supporting all students toward academic achievement and development, schools and classrooms can benefit from established value for diversity, varied perspectives and world views, as well as a culture of equity in learning opportunities for all students (Lalas & Morgan, 2006). In recognizing "an educational framework for social justice must value, rather than ignore, diversity" (Shields, 2004, p. 118), education professionals benefit from acknowledging the foundational role social justice and diversity play in the delivery of educationally-just learning (Lalas & Morgan, 2006). In an increasingly demanding profession, educational leaders cannot rely on practitioners to naturally engage in socially just processes (Baily et al., 2014), and as Everson and Bussey (2007) observe, the lack of knowledge over these concepts does not equate to a lack of responsibility. Consider the reality that today's educators and classroom practitioners are society's "frontline civil rights workers" (Brown, 2006, p. 701). While teaching aligned to social justice is notably difficult and emotional work (Bondy et al., 2017), as educators develop their awareness and understanding for social justice concepts, action may be taken (Brown,

2006) to close the achievement gap between diverse student populations and their White counter parts (Lalas & Morgan, 2006).

Exploring Education and Practice Through Policy

Practitioners may engage in expansive processes and pedagogies to ensure equitable learning among modern demographic changes and social realisms (Floden et al., 2020). Investigation over educational policies and resources in place for educators and academics may support the continued development of equitable learning. Strongly influenced by social, cultural, and political forces (Cizek, 1999; Edmondson, 2004), educational curriculum and state standards have served to increase expectations and accountability for student achievement (Floden et al., 2020). State accountability systems built on curriculum standards, instructional protocols, and student performance measures are layered within an already complex framework that calls on practitioners to intentionally support students with culturally responsive practices and socioemotional development (Floden et al. 2020). As practitioners strive to navigate an increasingly complicated policy matrix (Floden et al. 2020) to meet modern educational demands, it becomes critically important for practitioners to both engage in and understand policy (Edmondson, 2004). Considering that "words and the ideas they represent matter" (Radd & Grosland, 2018, p. 396), the examination of educational policy exposes contradictions and inadequacies, aiming to inform future improvements (Edmondson, 2004).

As policy demonstrates and communicates an expected ideal (Edmondson, 2004), there may be an assumption of certain cultural values and awareness within educational policy. However, research has often demonstrated that educational structures with diverse populations utilize policies which impede appreciation for their own diverse communities (Arce-Trigatti & Anderson, 2018). Examination of policy and its underlying discourse provides opportunity to

support critically conscious educational leadership (Radd & Grosland, 2018) as well as increased awareness for all individuals that the policy may impact (Edmondson, 2004). Cultural study scholars have examined policy and power dynamics through use of discourse, striving to discern capacities for both critique and change (Arce-Trigatti & Anderson, 2018). While policy study may vary within the specific approaches utilized, the overall goal of study is paramount to its design (Edmondson, 2004). Edmondson (2004) shares educators "need to critically understand policy, help others to understand it, and employ our sociological imaginations to offer alternatives to and new ideas for policy" (p. 91). In order to develop practitioners for today's classrooms and the distinct social needs within the modern-day school, critical examination of educational policy may offer the clarity needed to secure greater professional impact and critical consciousness for social justice education (SJE) practices.

Rationale for the Study

If schools are to be considered reflections of society (Khalil & Brown, 2015), the stark contrast found between educators and students raises concern. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveals that approximately 80% of the K-12 teaching workforce is White, while over 50% of the students are non-White (Riser-Kositsky, 2021). Schools serve as one of the primary social junctions of culture, backgrounds, and socioeconomic classes (Khalil & Brown, 2015), and education remains a key area towards the advancement in developing a transformed society that applies social justice realities (DeMulder et al., 2009). Educators often find themselves unprepared and under-developed in the task of working with diverse communities (DeMulder et al., 2009; Burns Thomas, 2007) and the variety of social issues and needs found within today's K-12 schools. In supporting the development of today's teaching workforce towards improved attitudes and awareness for social justice, there should be an effort

to understand social justice and its role in schools, as well as the professional needs faced by practitioners. When considering the role policy plays regarding the hope and potential for how things may operate, through both practice and discourse (Edmondson, 2004), K-2 policy and educational documents may be critically analyzed to identify and examine a variety of professional areas to support and build teachers towards social justice, while also considering effective inclusion of related concepts within classroom practice moving forward**.**

Towards this end, there may first be an established understanding of what SJE encompasses, in both its meaning and value within K-12 settings. This study acknowledges understanding SJE as it is described within the study's *Operational Definitions*. Here SJE is recognized as the purposeful educational practices that support student equity and achievement through the recognized value and respect for all learners (Lalas & Morgan, 2006), with acknowledgment for all social identity groups, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability (Dover, 2009). There is proven connection between student achievement and teachers' expectations, social identity, and bias (Dover, 2009). The influence of practitioners' expectations and behaviors on student learning (Gottfredson et al., 1995) is compounded for diverse learners by hegemonic classroom practices (Dover, 2009) and social inequalities (Lalas & Morgan, 2006). In a study centered on school administrators focused on social justice within schools (Theoharis, 2007), the participants revealed associations between staff member attitudes and beliefs proved to be resistant to their overall work and school-based outcomes.

In recognizing the consequence of practitioner beliefs and attitudes towards ideas such as social justice and equity (Khalil & Brown, 2015), an awareness of varied worldviews (Baily et al., 2014) appears pivotal as unexplored biases may result in decreased commitment to culturally responsive practice (Samuels, 2018) and produce negative influences on both teaching and

learning (Pollack, 2012). Working within the framework of a largely White workforce, many K-12 educators hold backgrounds and life experiences removed from those of their students, which inclines the acceptance of deficit thinking (Pollack, 2012). Through acknowledgement that professional learning shapes practice (Webster-Wright, 2009), the provision of guidance in developing practicing teachers on both pedagogical skills and advocacy of social justice for education is imperative (Lalas, 2007). Additionally, there is a reality of wide-ranging staff experiences and knowledge among new and experienced practitioners. However, there may be support through intentional and transparent acknowledgement of both practitioner and professional needs. Avoidance of discussion for inequity within schools often prevents practitioners' understanding (Groenke, 2010) although their professional responsibility in navigating effective use of curriculum and instruction (Lalas, 2007) remains unchanged. Floden et al. (2020) shares the crucial acknowledgement that "to make substantial changes to current teachers' perspectives and practices will require significant and sustained opportunities of professional learning" (p. 6). While much of the current research examines educational leaders' and administrators' engagement with supporting cultural competencies and social justice frameworks, further research is needed to better understand how policies shape curriculum and expectations for professional learning based in these components among classroom practitioners.

Research Purpose and Questions

In supporting the development of today's teaching workforce towards equity as well as improved attitudes and awareness for social justice, there must be an effort to establish a greater sense of effective professional learning structures placed to operationalize knowledge of SJE and related professional impact with the frontline workers in K-12 education: the classroom practitioners. Examination over Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) policies and

educational documents, through a critical pedagogical lens, was utilized to identify and analyze formal communication used to demonstrate expectation of professional capacities and relevant, necessary professional learning regarding social justice concepts. The study's scope was based in focused analysis of K-2 policy application, grounded in the understanding of grade spans outlined by KSDE (Kansas State Department of Education, 2020), with the singular adjustment of removing Pre-K from inclusion due to a standardized inclusion of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade within Kansas elementary schools.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What language is used to formally address concepts of social justice education within K-2 professional policies and educational documents?

a. How are concepts of critical pedagogy situated within K-2 policies and educational documents?

2. What professional expectations are established within the Department of Education's professional policies to support the facilitation of purposeful professional learning outcomes based in social justice concepts among K-2 practitioners?

Theoretical Framework

With careful consideration for both the research topic and intent, the theoretical framework is based in critical pedagogy, which has been widely influenced and attributed to Paulo Freire (Darder et al., 2017; Kincheloe et al., 2011; Winkle-Wagner, et al., 2019), who also believed in the essential and thorough knowledge of authorized curriculum (Darder et al., 2017). Though Kinchelo et al. (2011) acknowledged the relationship between critical theory and critical pedagogy is difficult to definitively describe, critical pedagogy reflects key tenets of critical

theory, including the evaluation of practice in order to identify embedded dominant culture as well as acknowledgement of hegemony and power structures within the context of education (Darder et al., 2017). As critical theory allows for "researchers and participants to challenge norms that oppress marginalized communities in order to bring about change" (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019, p. 11), critical pedagogy offers a framework for questioning systems to review complicit perpetuation (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019) and civic courage (Giroux, 2020) towards challenge and change. Critical theoretical research, while based in critical theory, was determined to be further served through critical pedagogy as a theoretical lens. This provided the distinct context of education while also investigating through a lens for social justice.

Critical pedagogy supports use of "qualitative research for social justice purposes, including making such research accessible for public education, social policy making, and community transformation" (Denzin, 2017, p. 8). Giroux (2020) describes critical pedagogy as an opportunity for practitioners to strive for knowledge transformation rather than simple consumption. Aimed at addressing cultural politics, critical pedagogy strives to challenge perceptions shaped by history and socioeconomic realities (Darder et al., 2017) through a framework of system interrogation (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019) which insists on careful deliberation and judgement (Giroux, 2020). Comprised of critical practices, it prioritizes critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness, which each serve as foundational components of teaching for social justice (Dover, 2009). Working through a lens aimed at addressing power and equity, critical pedagogy fosters practitioner reflection over professional and pedagogical habits (Khan Vlach et al., 2019). Freire observes critical reflection as a vital component to transformation (Brown, 2004), which supports the vision of educational systems working towards inclusivity, equity, and democracy (Shields, 2010). Critical pedagogical

concepts allowed for meaningful analysis of policy and educational documents which consider

not only impact of use but do so through a lens which purposefully considered the professional

development needs for effective practitioners in relation to critical considerations connected to

social realities and delivery of equitable, culturally aware practice.

Establishing Critical Pedagogy through Culturally Responsive Teaching

Forms of cultural analysis often under-utilize the concepts found within critical pedagogy

(Sleeter, 2011). However, as critical pedagogy maintains an emphasis on the practice of posing

questions within educational processes (Darder et al., 2017), it may be ideally facilitated through

the lens of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching aligns academic

achievement with active teacher reflection on culture and language (Gay, 2018). Understanding

over culturally responsive instructional application tends to vary widely, specifically through

overly simplistic and limited (Sleeter, 2011) views of use. A component of multicultural

education, culturally responsive teaching is acknowledged as a multidimensional approach to

teaching in which various components related to classrooms, context, and social realities are

connected to student learning (Gay, 2018). Gay (2018) acknowledges effective implementation

of culturally responsive teaching demands clear focus on "those elements of cultural

socialization that most directly affect learning" (p. 39). Misuse of culturally responsive teaching

by educators often results in uncomfortable classroom situations, lack of relationship building,

and ineffective application to curriculum and learning opportunities (Irvine, 2010). This misuse

aids in establishing support for alignment of culturally responsive teaching and critical

pedagogy, which often strives to transform classroom structures and practices (Darder et al.,

2017). With this in mind, critical pedagogy supports the use of qualitative research for the sake

of social justice purposes within public education (Denzin, 2017). The methodological

framework, as outlined in this chapter, will strive to exemplify critical pedagogy through purposeful application of critical research methods.

Methodological Framework

This study utilized the qualitative research methodology of critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis. The development of the methodology was based in recognizing qualitative research can support social justice through the identification of different aspects of issues and situations where changes are needed (Denzin, 2017). While qualitative research is implemented through wide-ranging methods, "each practice makes the world visible in a different way" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 30), supporting the work of critical educators, which practice the exploration and acknowledgement of various sides to a problem (Darder et al., 2017). With a theoretical framework based in critical pedagogy, critical inquiry was the selected methodology for this study's research design. Critical inquiry is "oriented toward the interests of marginalized social groups, emancipatory, uses intellectual effort to work toward a more just society" (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 208). As critical research is inherently supportive of social justice (Crotty, 1998; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019), it considers the impact of various systems and the presence of inequity (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004) among them. While there are multiple components to critical research design, the trait present within the context of this study was the connection of meaning to realities of social power and control in relation to large systems and structures (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004) with the goal of supporting social change (Crotty, 1998). Taking to heart the ability of qualitative research to "influence social policy in important ways" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 55), the researcher conducted a critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis.

As Bhattacharya (2017) emphasizes, research questions were designed with the theoretical framework in mind, supporting relevance toward the study purpose. The researcher also completed a reflective journal throughout the data collection process, supporting close examination of findings and theme development among the various pieces of data collected. Data collection included both the acquirement and review of purposefully selected policies made publicly available through the KSDE website, collected and analyzed over a period lasting one academic quarter (approximately nine weeks). Separate coding rounds were organized based on Saldana's (2016) and Gee's (2014) strategies of coding to support data analysis and the determination of themes related to the study questions and purpose, which were supported through a critical discourse analysis design, regarding language used within the collected policies and documents. Included pieces for data collection are outlined in Figure 1.1, as well as considerations for the overall study design. Methodological decisions for this study were based in the qualitative values supporting critical inquiry in aid of the examination of social justice contexts related to educational research. The following sections establish value for the important role each methodological technique plays within this study.

Figure 1.1.

Research Design Overview

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy

Critical Reflection	Critical Dialogue	Critical Consciousness

Methodology: Critical Policy Analysis through Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Policy Analysis through examination of both policy and related educational documents which considers specific professional expectations and practice(s) connected to social justice education

Critical Discourse Analysis through a focused review of terminology and meaning based in professional context, with specific consideration for language related to culturally responsive teaching as discourse demonstrating critical pedagogy

Data Collection: KSDE Policy and Educational Documents

Educator Evaluation: KEEP Teacher Instructional Practices Protocol

Professional Learning: Kansas Professional Development Program Guidelines

College and Career Ready (CCR) Standards: 2020 Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies (HGSS); 2017 Math; 2017 English Language Arts (ELA)

Additional Policies: Kansans Can Civic Engagement Fact Sheet; 10 Mostly Instructional Practices to Improve Civic Engagement in Any Classroom

Researcher Reflective Journal: Maintained for each separate policy and document review, utilized for theme development, and finding interpretations

Targeted Research

Findings based in CRT demonstration of Critical Pedagogy components within KSDE policy and	Findings based in Critical Discourse Analysis demonstrating social	Findings based on implications tied to professional training needs

Critical Policy Analysis and Document Analysis Through Critical Inquiry

While approaches may vary according to study goals (Edmondson, 2004), policy analysis supports advocacy through purposeful evaluation over policy content (Prunty, 1985). Policy may be considered ambiguous (Prunty, 1985). However, this study acknowledges policy as it is outlined within the study's *Operational Definitions*, which defines policy as text-based procedural and regulative statements which utilizes language focused on communicating an ideal (Edmondson, 2004) and an expectation of professional practice**.** This understanding of policy recognizes the communication of idealized expectations (Edmondson, 2004) for professional practice which specifically aligns to the work of K-2 practitioners within the study analysis. Prunty (1985) states "critical policy analysis must attend simultaneously to the working of the school and the working of society" (p. 135). When utilizing critical policy analysis to explore policy effectiveness and potential social consequences (Edmondson, 2004) this study considers the values represented (Prunty, 1985) as well as those which are not. Taylor (1997) recognizes questions over which data is necessary for critical policy analysis holds less importance than purposeful consideration for research questions and theoretical frameworks. Document analysis is included within the critical policy methodology to support a prioritized focus on effective and robust data collection (Bowen, 2009). Used to systematically analyze and evaluate documents (Bowen, 2009), document analysis supports the study's aim to analyze educational policies available online through the KSDE website. With the goals of the current study in mind, including consideration for the study's definition and framework for 'policy', educational documents were utilized as policy, serving as institutional and organizational texts. As outlined in Figure 1.1, selected policies for analysis included texts from the following KSDE content areas: Educator Evaluation; Professional Learning; and College and Career Readiness (CCR)

Standards. Multiple content areas and policies were selected to build credibility and trustworthiness through robust data collection (Bowen, 2009). Each individual policy and text were selected based on connection and context related to professional expectations and practices relevant to SJE and culturally responsive teaching. The researcher also acknowledges and verifies that context of policy extends beyond content and there is value in recognizing policy context through the reflection over date of creation, as well as correlating cultural and social realities (Gee, 2014; Prunty, 1985) Additional data collection included the researcher's reflective journal in support of thorough reflection, synthesis, and analysis over findings, supporting eventual organization of themes and categories (Bowen, 2009).

Supporting Critical Policy Analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis

Though institutional documents are a valued component of qualitative work (Bowen, 2009), it is important to ensure vital areas such as language and meaning are not taken for granted (Taylor, 1997) within the research. Considering the usefulness in discourse theories' ability to investigate policies through both their context and consumption (Taylor, 1997), critical discourse analysis has proven to both correspond and compliment educational research through social commitment and varying theoretical perspectives (Rogers, 2011). Gee (2014) supports the adaptation of tools taken from one's selected theory towards meeting the needs of individual discourse analysis research, which in this study connects directly to the critical pedagogy framework. Supporting work associated with wider social issues (Gee, 2014), discourse analysis supports the enhanced scope of critical policy analysis through clear "focus on policy documents as texts" (Taylor, 1997, p. 25). Critical discourse analysis also allows a focused review over various social justice concepts, which require complex evaluations due to evolving terminology and meanings often based on context and politics (Taylor, 1997). This study observed an

approach to discourse analysis which focuses on ideas, issues, and themes connected to the examined policies (Gee, 2014) as well as the context of the discourse (Rogers, 2011; Taylor, 1997). Here, discourse analysis was utilized to enhance policy analysis through careful examination of language and meaning within the collected data, striving to support deeper understanding of current educational processes and opportunity for development. Specifically, the critical discourse analysis will consider language related to culturally responsive teaching as discourse demonstrating critical pedagogy.

Significance and Relevance

The research related to pre-service educators and first year practitioners to preparedness for cultural competency within professional practice is numerous. However, there remains limited study connected to experienced practitioners and culturally responsive practice, and what does exist is often limited to case studies (Sleeter, 2011). What current research does manage to demonstrate is a reality of practitioners' reliance on self-directed learning for professional gains related to SJE (Dover, 2009; Peirce, 2005). Past research has also established links between student learning outcomes and teachers' behavior and professional practices (Pollack, 2012). In recognition that practitioners must establish the imperative for equity and advocation (Dover, 2009), the current study demonstrated support for the development of practitioners through careful examination of educational policy. Research was conducted in order to demonstrate professional expectations related to culturally responsive practices in connection to SJE, as well as demonstrate a potential gap in policy in terms of professional processes for practitioners, specifically the professional learning tied to the development and support of equitable K-2 learning structures.

Limits and Possibilities of the Study

This study conducted a critical examination of policy to discern professional expectations related to equity-based work within K-2 learning, related to SJE. A limitation that arose upon study design was the lack of localized school district policies explicitly connected to these areas. Current social trends related to social justice is gradually transitioning equity practices within the landscape of public education, but admittedly that is a slow-paced journey, with the gravity of progress landing on practitioners' shoulders to self-explore and demonstrate value (Dover, 2009). The limitation of localized policy leads this study to focus specifically on the state-level educational department. The policies and documents obtained were those which were publicly available, eliminating any requirement of specialized authorization to obtain. Additionally, the scope of the research was narrowed from a K-12 to a K-2 focus to ensure effective and purposeful data collection, allowing the researcher to provide a focused, extensive review of applicable policy. Future research would benefit from study design which incorporates the larger K-12 school system.

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher acknowledges subjectivity in the form of professional background. As a seasoned K-12 practitioner, prior professional experiences have impressed the need for response to social issues within educational structures. Personal experiences with diverse school communities have exposed the researcher to the recognition of unconscious bias and teacher blind-spots. As qualitative research demonstrates an often-intimate relationship between the researcher and the content studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013), the intended policy analysis was filtered through a framework which included not only educational concepts for analysis, but also

professional background and experiences. With an additional level of personalized expertise, the researcher has taught all three of the grade levels included in this study, including kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. This study was conducted both for the benefit of educators as well as students, with the intention of establishing greater professional learning to become standardized among practicing professionals. The researcher acknowledges benefits of analysis exists both within grounded research as well as professional insights and experience with applied educational policy.

Operational Definitions

1. *Critical pedagogy-* A theoretical framework based in the examination of equity and power issues (Vlach et al., 2019) in relation to socially marginalized groups, with intended personal learning and growth facilitated through critical practices such as critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness.

   a. *Critical reflection-*A combination of critical inquiry and self-reflection (Brown, 2004), which purposefully examines beliefs and perceptions (Brown, 2006), striving to identify and challenge personal assumptions (Baily et al., 2014).

   b. *Critical dialogue-*A method for expanding knowledge through critical questioning (Baily et al., 2014) supporting exposure to varied perspectives and worldviews (Shields, 2004), utilizing both internal and external dialogue (Baily et al., 2014).

   c. *Critical consciousness-*The development of personal awareness in relation to cultural norms and values, as well as social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995), acknowledging oppressive educational realities (Kohli et al., 2015).

2. *Culturally Responsive Teaching-* Overlapping concepts include culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, as well as culturally responsive education. For

this study, culturally responsive teaching refers to a student centered (Samuels, 2018), multidimensional approach to teaching (Gay, 2018; Samuels et al., 2017) which "encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments (Gay, 2018, p. 39) specifically promoting equitable learning and academic achievement (Samuels et al., 2017). Culturally responsive teaching may be abbreviated to CRT within coding and analysis shorthand.

3. *Diversity*-Demographic differences (Khalil & Brown, 2015) according to "racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social-class groups" (Gay, 2018, p. xii), which is observed within this study through the lens of a largely homogenic educational workforce vs. a growing heterogenic student population (Baily et al., 2014).

4. *Equity*-Given the context of this study, equity was defined as the demonstration of educational access and opportunity within public school learning structures which establish academic achievement for all student groups (Stembridge, 2020).

5. *K-12*-This is an abbreviated reference to the public-school system's grade levels ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade. This research focused on public schooling systems and will not include private, charter, or religious educational facilities.

    a. *K-2*-The present study took a focused look at grade levels kindergarten to second grade, which will be referred to as K-2.

6. *Practitioner*-This term was used in lieu of 'teacher' or 'educator' due to the variance of professionals who work within the school framework to support student learning and academic achievement. It refers to all professionals with licensure and certification to work within the K-12 system.

7. *Policy*-This study defined policy as text-based procedural and regulative statements which utilizes language focused on communicating an ideal (Edmondson, 2004) and an expectation of professional practice.

8. *Professional learning*-A form of adult learning considered necessary or required to "maintain relevancy and effectiveness" (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017, p. 36) in relation to professional practice and expected work-roles.

9. *Social justice education*-Based in the context of social justice issues in K-12 schools, this may be understood as the purposeful educational practices that support student equity and achievement through the recognized value and respect for all learners (Lalas & Morgan, 2006), with acknowledgment for all social identity groups, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability (Dover, 2009).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, professional needs among K-12 practitioners were explored, with specific regard for changing school demographics and social realities in today's classrooms, along with the cascading professional considerations to support equity in education through SJE. With a theoretical framework of critical pedagogy, critical policy analysis and critical discourse analysis were outlined as selected methodology. Formed through critical qualitative inquiry, the researcher pursued greater insights into educational policy and the role it plays in the professional learning needs associated with the implementation of SJE and culturally responsive teaching practices according to K-2 practitioner policy guidelines and expectations.

Organization of the Study

The following chapters review the study, including a review of the literature, the study's methodology, findings, and a discussion and implications for practice. Chapter two presents a review of the literature over SJE within today's K-12 school structure, including description of the role critical pedagogy plays within professional learning towards effective work in equitable and culturally responsive teaching practices. Chapter three outlines the study's theoretical and methodological framework, reviewing the researcher's steps and processes taken, related to critical pedagogy as a framework for critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis. Chapter four presents the findings within the policy analysis, leading to chapter five's discussion over findings as well as conclusive remarks and recommendations over the study. Documentation of all sources and texts are noted within the bibliography, followed by the appendices and all supplemental content.

Chapter Two

This chapter examines the literature connected to the key concepts within the research topic. Through a careful review of the literature and consideration for the ways it intersects to define and drive the development of practitioners for SJE in today's schools, we may begin to see opportunity to build on the work of previous research. Key concepts within the literature are noted below in Figure 2.1, which demonstrates core concepts related to the literature examined as a base of knowledge for this study. In this chapter a careful review and analysis of key concepts in literature, including the examination previous research findings, are recognized, and discussed.

Figure 2.1.

Core Study Concepts

Social Justice and K-12 Schools

Social justice and K-12 schools has become an issue of paramount interest. While social justice concerns have long existed within school structures, current research may open new doors to acknowledging and supporting K-12 social justice needs. Due to the growing disparity between teacher demographics and those of K-12 students (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020; Gay, 2018; Khalil & Brown, 2015), it is vital that educators "are not vehicles for prejudice, classism, and racism" (Khalil & Brown, 2015, p. 80). Students from marginalized ethnic groups as well as those with low socioeconomic status do not perform at the same academic levels as peers from less marginalized backgrounds (Shields, 2004). In supporting all students towards academic achievement and development, schools and classrooms must establish value for diversity, varied perspectives and world views, and a culture of equity in learning opportunities for all students (Lalas & Morgan, 2006). To support all learners, there must be an established understanding of what SJE encompasses, in both its meaning and value within K-12 settings. Armed with this knowledge, professional responsibility assumes a vital role in moving forward. Specifically, this study conducted a critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis to examine formal communication used to demonstrate professional expectations, including professional learning, in connection to social justice concepts.

Building Understanding and Value for Social Justice

Social justice deficits within K-12 schools may present in various ways, due to the wide-ranging associations with the term 'social justice education'. Observance of the numerous examples and contexts assists in building understanding and value for the role social justice plays in educational settings. Current issues involving social justice in today's schools are recognized

in achievement gaps, high dropout rates, and over identification of behavioral issues (Shields, 2004) pertaining to marginalized student groups. The perpetuation of the status quo (Brown, 2006) ignores the prevalent needs of both low-income and diverse communities. Within this state, "educators today are actually the frontline civil rights workers in a long-term struggle to increase equity" (Brown, 2006, p. 701). While SJE is often spouted as a solution to student equity and outcomes (Everson & Bussey, 2007), there exists a range of understanding among educators, activists, and researchers (Burns Thomas, 2007), requiring an acknowledgement of the varied definitions (Dover, 2009) within different frameworks and contexts. To determine meaningful understanding of SJE for K-12 schools, insight may be found through exploration of what it looks like in the K-12 classroom, as well as from a practitioner perspective. Sometimes considered "anti-oppression education" (Lalas, 2007), SJE is thought of by some to establish a quality of fairness within communities (Everson & Bussey, 2007). There is an innate understanding that SJE resembles supportive learning environments (Lalas, 2007) that reflect justice as well as democratic practices. Social justice educators often demonstrate a mindset for recognizing social justice concerns, desiring to "right what has been made wrong" (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014, p. 749), as well as the prioritization of equity, ethical values, and respect (Lalas, 2007) within daily classroom and school practices. In considering this application of social justice, as well as the context of use for the K-12 educator, this paper recognizes SJE as the purposeful educational practices that support student achievement and equity through the establishment of value and respect for all learners (Lalas & Morgan, 2006; Lalas, 2007), acknowledging student diversity, social class, backgrounds, cultural beliefs, and world views (Lalas, 2007). Utilizing this definition, the role of practitioners in using SJE to support effective

and meaningful professional practice is understood as both a professional need and a responsibility.

A Systemic Issue and a Professional Responsibility

While some practitioners take on a natural desire to support SJE and equitable practices for all students, it should not be considered typical (Baily et al., 2014), leading to the need of establishing value for social justice among practicing K-12 teachers. Theoharis' (2007) study conducted with public school principals found teachers to be a key area of resistance in establishing school-wide socially just orientations to learning and school culture. The findings specifically observed teacher attitudes and beliefs to be obstructive to progress. Lalas (2007) emphasizes the powerful role practitioners play, stating that classroom teachers are essential to SJE, as they have "the ultimate responsibility to navigate the curriculum and instruction with their students in the classroom" (p. 19). In consideration of a predominately white teaching workforce (Gay, 2018; Grant & Gillete, 2006), there is related impact in observing a systematic issue of school cultures that reflect 'White culture' (Peirce, 2005). The persistent institution of hegemonic classroom values continues to amplify social inequities (Dover, 2009), while also maintaining uninformed educator mindsets of presumed cultural neutrality (Peirce, 2005) and an avoidance of recognizing systems of privilege. With that in mind, it is important to recognize that, while many K-12 practitioners may not readily understand or recognize issues of SJE, they are not excluded from the responsibility (Everson & Bussey, 2007) to execute socially just teaching practices.

Educationally just learning environments are established through the active advocacy of SJE practices by K-12 faculty (Lalas & Morgan, 2006). This is especially necessary as evidence suggests the oppression and marginalization of K-12 students including the following student

groups: students of color, students with disabilities, students with low socioeconomic status, students in the LGBTQ community, as well as English language learners (Kose & Lim, 2011). These issues based in SJE are manifested further within urban public schools, as studies reveal students attending these schools "face many educational challenges and failures associated with race, ethnicity, poverty, and social inequality" (Lalas & Morgan, 2006, p. 21). One study which examined casual, informal teacher-talk over students (Pollack, 2012) observed daily, routine conversations and statements of in-service teachers. Findings determined practitioners often demonstrated deficit student perspectives as well as an uncritical acceptance of stereotypes, which were typically based in racial or cultural differences. Pollack (2012) concluded his findings with the hope of challenging and disrupting these narratives among practitioners. Considering the key role K-12 faculty play in supporting SJE, steps to improve professional practice and teacher quality may be taken through examining professional needs and realities with a goal of developing educators capable of establishing SJE practices within today's classrooms.

Practitioner Realities: Recognizing Professional Needs

Work connected to social justice is known to be difficult and emotional (Bondy, et al., 2017). Nonetheless, it is necessary, as evidenced by research which reveals educators' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences may impact equitable practices (Khalil & Brown, 2015). If educational values are demonstrated through texts, practices, and discourses (Edmondson, 2004), educational policies serve as an additional data point and insight into practitioner needs and professional realities. Often, practitioners and administrators tend to avoid dialogue and critical recognition of race and poverty in relation to student outcomes (Groenke, 2010), revealing issues in unawareness of equity concerns, as well as avoidance of engagement with SJE as a method in

supporting all learners. A core attribute of SJE lies in its support of all K-12 students through teaching based in established value and respect for all learners (Lalas & Morgan, 2006; Lalas, 2007). Samuels' (2018) work with practitioners provided opportunity to examine in-service teachers' perspectives connected to culturally responsive teaching. During this study, participants identified various professional needs which they attributed as standard challenges in supporting all students. These barriers included, among other things, time restraints due to classroom demands, limited access to professional resources and pedagogical strategies, as well as the lack of confidence in knowledge and language to engage with culturally responsive practices. Practitioners' professional needs often subvert the development of these values, through consistent limitations and concerns related to their awareness, attitudes, and purposeful professional learning opportunities. Through recognition and careful examination of professional needs, insights may begin to develop in supporting practitioners towards SJE work within schools.

The Power of Policy: Making a Place for Practitioners

The demands within today's classrooms rooted in diversity and social justice needs may be seen as mutually responsive and compounded by educational accountability regulations and academic protocol (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020). In fact, classrooms are often representative of the manifestation of educational policy, regarding structures, procedures, and professional expectations (Prunty, 1985). The complicated policy matrix practitioners navigate is made up of curricular standards, student performance and accountability measures, guidelines for instructional resource selection, and more (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020). While policy does not maintain a standardized form (Prunty, 1985), this study recognized policy as outlined in chapter

one's operationalized definitions, which acknowledges policy as text-based procedural and regulative statements which utilizes language focused on communicating an ideal (Edmondson, 2004) and an expectation of professional practice. Practitioners may collectively and purposefully work towards improving policies (Edmondson, 2004) with consideration through a lens of totality rather than singular dimensions, which Freire (2000) warns practitioners against in an effort to avoid oppressive actions. Often, power and control exerted over practitioners and instructional practices is legitimized through educational policy (Prunty, 1985), and the examination of said policy allows for greater analysis of appropriating context as well as determine important background information in understanding policy operation (Bowen, 2009). Practitioners may intervene in the norms and processes within education through greater analysis over educational documents (Schwarz, 2019), which allows evaluation over the ideologies and values represented and institutionalized through established educational policy (Prunty, 1985).

When considering the power of policy, it is vital to also examine the presence of purpose. One of the lenses to view policy purpose is through the theory of affordance. Though there is not a singular theory of affordance (Evans, Pearce, Vitak & Treem, 2017), Gibson (1979) first intended it as a theoretical construct which considers action possibilities. Affordance theory was originally developed in ecological psychology (Gibson, 1979; Hallström & Jacob, 2017; Scarantino, 2003) and focused on the psychology of perception (Hutchby, 2001). With a focus on identifying the 'essential complementarity between organisms and environment" (Scarantino, 2003, p. 950), the affordance concept examines the various "conditions through which an affordance affects a target" (Hallström & Jacob, 2017, p. 605). When applying a theory of affordance to policy analysis, there is correlation through assumptions over what users will do (Hallström & Jacob, 2017) with policy, independent of actual perception over whether

affordance actions are perceived (Michaels, 2003; Scarantino, 2003). Because affordance considers possibilities rather than necessities, it considers both how something could be enabled or how it could constrain the user (Hallström & Jacob, 2017; Hutchby, 2001). For affordance constructs to support greater policy understanding, context and the agent's utilizing policy must be considered (Hallström & Jacob, 2017), and then consideration of possibilities for action in association to those particular contexts (Evans et al., 2017). A theory of affordances applied to policy analysis denotes the understanding that policy characteristics may both facilitate or restrict actual policy action (Hallström & Jacob, 2017). Expanding policy purpose into actual policy applications, it is vital to consider actual policy research reflecting the constraints and actions connected to policy use.

An important study over educational policy in the state of California was conducted by Cohen and Lowenberg Ball (1990) which offers insight and analysis over the mutual responsiveness of educational policy and teaching practices. This case study examined elementary teachers' response to updated mathematics policies which were considered ambitious reforms to both instructional protocol as well as student assessment programs. Cohen and Lowenberg Ball (1990) investigated practitioners' interpretation to the state-level policy, and their findings revealed a range of responses, with some teacher-practitioners demonstrating full acceptance and radical classroom changes, while others demonstrated very little change and tolerance. Ultimately, the researchers determined that, while educational policy had the ability to influence professional practice, in return, professional practices also had the unique ability to affect the educational policy, observing that the policy only impacted student learning, its intended purpose, through the filter of knowledge, acceptance, and teaching practices of each individual practitioner. The concluding insight reached by Cohen and Lowenberg Ball was that

educational policies must maintain an insightful awareness for practitioners' positions and professional knowledge and development, as "policies that seek to change instructional practice depend upon-and are changed by-the practice and the practitioners they seek to change" (Cohen & Lowenberg Ball, 1990, p. 238). Taking their findings into consideration, potential implications in policy and practice maintaining alignment appears problematic at best, supporting examination over policy language as it applies to both school and professional contexts.

Failures in Acknowledgement: A Closer Look at Teacher Awareness

The role of teacher awareness is of priority concern when considering professional deficits regarding work with students and school communities. Teacher awareness, concerning social realities within classrooms, may represent a key insight into practitioners' struggles to effectively support all learners. The incongruence between K-12 teacher demographics and student populations (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020; Gay, 2018; Khalil & Brown, 2015) provides a plausible source for the low awareness of personal and institutional bias and subsequently lowered commitment to (Samuels, 2018) and expectations of marginalized students. Research shows practitioners report minimal knowledge of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Demulder et al., 2009; Samuels, 2018), which manifests through an avoidance and discomfort with addressing controversial topics (Samuels, 2018), specifically regarding the acknowledgement of difference and diversity (Shields, 2004). The avoidance then further perpetuates the status quo within schools and classrooms, while also sending a strong message of encouraged 'sameness' among marginalized students (Shields, 2004). Teacher awareness is perceivably based in knowledge and understanding, which is expanded and exemplified within additional areas of professional concerns, such as teacher attitudes.

Failures in Understanding: A Closer Look at Teacher Attitudes

Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences can each impact equitable practices (Khalil & Brown, 2015). A study analyzing impact of social justice leadership and school equity reveals that teacher attitudes can in fact result in resistance towards social justice measures to ensure equity (Theoharis, 2007). One of the primary results of unexplored educator bias and attitude is the presence of deficit thinking. Deficit thinking refers to teachers' assignment of blame for poor or failing academic achievement (Pollack, 2012) on generalized stereotypes (Samuels, 2018; Shields, 2004). In a study tracking informal teacher 'talk' (Pollack, 2012), casual teacher exchanges were monitored for deficit perspectives, and it was noted that teachers with limited exposure to communities of color or low-income families demonstrated an uncritical acceptance of deficit perspectives and negative stereotypes. Some common examples of deficit thinking include the belief in marginalized students maintaining a lack of value for education as well as a lack of motivation, the limitation of positive role models, as well as an assumption of poor parenting (Pollack, 2012). Deficit-based thinking not only results in lowered academic expectations (Pollack, 2012), but is often enhanced through the practice of deficit discourse. Acceptance of deficit perspectives typically stems from a lack of acknowledgement over personal bias and beliefs and is often based in unacknowledged privilege (Baily et al., 2014), which results in practitioners who are unable to effectively engage and support all learners (Khalil & Brown, 2015). Practitioners unable to engage all learners reflects a vital area of concern related to SJE practices within schools based in a professional need, which is this time associated with teacher attitudes, presumably derived from limitations in teacher awareness. Realization of these areas of failures pertaining to professional acknowledgement and

understanding leads to questions regarding current professional learning, with an aim to understand what supports are in place to effectively develop practitioners within these areas.

Failures in Development: A Closer Look at Professional Learning

In response to the concern for teacher awareness and attitudes, a review over the steps currently taken to support teacher training and development can inform practice. An examination of current professional learning practices articulated in policy may provide a greater understanding of effective educator supports. Unfortunately, there remain many failing traits within current professional development for practicing K-12 educators, each of which emphasizes a lack in quality training for social justice praxis (Bondy et al., 2017) based in equitable educational outcomes. Often, practitioners do not associate traditional forms of training with an outcome of learning (Webster-Wright, 2009), resulting in reliance on nontraditional professional learning practices to support teachers' shifts towards becoming leaders of social change (DeMulder, et al., 2009). While there is significant debate in determining quality professional development (Dahlberg & Philippot, 2008), there is little question that practitioner needs reflect an emphasis on provision of strategies and tools that serve their work within classrooms and schools (Groenke, 2010). To move forward in teacher professional development, acknowledgement of failing practices must be considered with hopes of establishing an evolution of professional learning structures for K-12 practitioners which is both meaningful and effective in supporting students. Within the current state of education, practitioners are often positioned as passive participants (Kohli, et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2014), in a transmission-based professional learning structure. This structure serves to impact the removal of context within professional development content, eliminating practitioner input and applications for improved practice (Dahlberg & Philippot, 2008; Kohli, et al., 2015), which often leads practitioners to resort to self-

directed learning to obtain the knowledge and strategies needed. Each failing component of professional learning for practitioners demonstrates an important indicator for areas that must be acknowledged and assessed for change. Once assessed, considerations may be made to overcome these failing traits to support educator needs within the social justice realm.

Removing Teacher Agency: Transmission-Based Professional Development

A typical form of professional development reflects a 'training model' that is normally provided by an *expert* who is removed from classroom practices (Kohli, et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2014). Practitioners' opportunity for engagement is limited within this learning structure. This demonstrates a shared emphasis on transmission-based learning as well as banking education, as both maintain an instructor-centered approach to teachers' professional learning that places power and knowledge in the hands of those providing the training, while the teacher-learners are placed in a position to be 'filled' with the provided technical knowledge (Freire, 2000; Kohli et al., 2015; Webster-Wright, 2009). This exemplifies a complete elimination of critical practices towards meaningful professional change and development as it requires practitioners to receive information without personal connection or conviction for application.

Within this professional learning framework teacher agency is removed as a standardization of professional training, removing opportunity for practitioners to speak into their development and professional needs (Kennedy, 2014), while K-12 teachers should be actively engaged in professional development design (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Without professional development which considers and addresses practitioner input (Dahlberg & Philippot, 2008) over student and practitioner needs, as well as the acknowledgement of professional expertise (Kohli, et al., 2015), professional development will continue to be limited in value and meaning, especially concerning social needs within the classroom and community.

Removing Context: Ignoring Teacher Needs, Relevance, and Application

A notable and naturally occurring symptom of transmission-based learning and banking education within teacher professional development is the clear removal of professional context aligned to the provision of content. The removal of context results in a disconnect between professional learning and actual classroom practices (Dahlberg & Philippot, 2008), leaving practitioners with few tools and resources to apply within the context of their schools, classrooms (Kohli, et al., 2015; Gregson & Sturko, 2007), and the communities they work with. Webster-Wright (2009) states "context is perhaps the single most important influence on reflection and learning" (p. 722). In recognizing that context matters (Baily et al., 2014; Kose & Lim, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009), in learning (Bondy, et al., 2017) there exists potential benefit in providing practitioners with opportunity to express input towards professional development needs, enhancing the value, meaning, and application of professional development programs, as well as authentic, active engagement from teacher participants (Kose & Lim, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Reliance on Teachers for Self-Directed Learning

When considering the failing structures of professional development for K-12 practitioners, the need for meaningful learning that values teacher agency and classroom impact remains clear. However, in considering specific professional needs for SJE and its implementation, one of the major shortfalls in professional development is its lack of priority. "In the current system, social justice educators, along with other advocates of equity-oriented reform, are charged with 'proving' the imperative for, and efficacy of, their interventions, while those invested in maintaining the status quo have no such burden" (Dover, 2009, p. 507). Practitioners have expressed how problematic the deficits in social justice training are,

preventing the production of effective learning structures within diverse school communities, acknowledging an expectation of needing to seek out that form of professional learning on one's own time (Peirce, 2005). However, there are several teacher networks based in SJE that are geared specifically towards equity practices (Kohli et al., 2015). Navarro's (2018) study examined this reality through observing and interviewing participants in a teacher inquiry group which pursued pedagogical goals and social justice classroom practices. The study findings determined participants were validated and inspired to support SJE through participation in this professional community. However, the study also observed the need for more critical professional development to support educator growth. While communities of practice provide learning and activities situated within a relevant professional context (Gregson & Sturko, 2007), a reliance on practitioners to engage voluntarily in these networks to secure quality professional growth and development is yet another indicator of the inadequacies of established professional learning programs within the field of K-12 education. To secure school impact and equitable learning for all students, establishing an expectation of quality professional learning programs for teaching professionals can support the relevance and value for practitioners trained in SJE and equity practices universally, rather than a specialized few willing to engage in self-directed learning opportunities.

In working to overcome the professional needs of teachers regarding effective application of SJE within K-12 schools, it is critical to acknowledge that most of today's teachers are a part of the dominant population, with little experience of varied backgrounds or cultures (Samuels et al., 2017). A study examining teacher perspectives (Samuels, 2018) regarding culturally responsive teaching noted that teachers would greatly benefit through professional learning that explored personal beliefs (including values, assumptions, and areas of bias), encouraged dialogue

over controversial subjects to increase comfort and engagement, taught pedagogical practices for improved impact, as well as ensure implementation of collaboration in fostering inclusive school climates and cultures. Recognizing attitudes and ways of thinking are developed through focused and purposeful efforts (Stembridge, 2020), practitioners must come to understand "who their students are, where they come from, and the ideas and experiences they bring into the classroom" (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020, p. 39). Commitment to educating students in public schools requires a centered focus on culture and diversity (Gay, 2018) considering equity implications through careful concern for inquiry of pedagogy (Stembridge, 2020). In observance that nontraditional professional development supports the transformation of teachers into agents of social change (DeMulder et al., 2009), an ideal opportunity may rest in the use of a professional learning framework based in critical pedagogy, with opportunity to experience and develop critical reflection, dialogue, and consciousness towards development in cultural competency. Through critically centered professional learning, there exists greater potential for effective guidance of practitioners towards implementation of SJE.

Critical pedagogy: A Step Towards Developing Effective Practitioners

Establishing an understanding of professional responsibility towards creating socially just classrooms needs careful consideration. Examination over professional development practices allows for insight into current practitioners' training needs in relation to realities of SJE. Recognizing that "social class is a strong predictor of academic achievement in standardized measures" (Lalas & Morgan, 2006, p. 21), a movement towards nontraditional professional development can support increased social change (DeMulder et al., 2009; Lalas & Morgan, 2006). Professional learning examining inequity, privilege, and varied perspectives and

experiences of others can inform socially based professional needs (Lalas & Morgan, 2006).

Considering critical reflection and analysis of one's own beliefs is vital to this learning process

(Brown, 2006; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014), as well as the inclusion of social consciousness and

shared dialogue based in humanizing and critical components (Vlach et al., 2019), critical

pedagogy may prove key in meaningful professional learning for SJE.

Greater understanding of ways to improve the world are born from education in

partnership with critical pedagogy (Monchinski, 2008). Within this research, critical pedagogy's

key components of critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness, serve as a

framework for understanding professional learning which supports meaningful gains within K-12

structures. More specifically, critical pedagogy encourages teachers "to reflect on their

pedagogical practice through lenses of power and equity, with the aim of addressing inequities"

(Vlach et al., 2019, p. 63). In a study (DeMulder et al., 2009) conducted with in-service teachers

within a graduate program, participants took part in specialized scaffolded curriculum which

aimed to support reflective processes over the self and others, then applying those reflections

within practice. The study findings supported positive impact in participants' development of

awareness and value for various perspectives and experiences, increased responsiveness to

others, as well as increased dialogue over processing personal reflections and perspectives

related to their learning. As this study demonstrates, critical pedagogy permits practitioners to

learn and develop through guided critical practices including reflection, dialogue, and

consciousness building in relation to socially marginalized groups. Examination of critical

pedagogy through a lens of professional applications provides a greater view of professional

learning potential as well as meaningful opportunity in practitioner development towards

effective professional social justice practices. Additionally, exploration of critiques over critical pedagogy in education provides insights in potential obstacles to navigate in moving forward.

Critical Pedagogy Realized: Professional Applications

In opposition to banking education (Freire, 2000; Kirylo & Thirumurthy, 2010), critical pedagogy allows for practitioners to serve as moral agents (Major & Celedon-Pattichis, 2011) engaging in the examination of everyday societal roles and power relations (Kirylo & Thirumurthy, 2010; Darder et al., 2017). Paulo Freire, a founding philosopher of critical pedagogy (Darder et al, 2017) warned against practitioners thinking for or imposing thoughts on their students (Freire, 2000), instead promoting critical pedagogy as an effective form of praxis (Freire, 2000; Monchinski, 2008). Freire's (2000) praxis demonstrates the power of action and reflection in partnership, which Monchinski (2008) builds on by emphasizing "praxis involves theorizing practice and practicing theory" (p. 1). Giroux (1989) acknowledges the dynamic relationship between theory and practice as well, stating "theory in some instances directly informs practice, whereas in others, practice restructures theory as a primary force for change" (p. 133). Considering the active phenomenon of hegemony (Darder et al., 2017) in schools, as well as valuing the push to root subject matter and resources in students' lives (Monchinski, 2008), the attraction of teachers to explore critical teaching practices should support practice driving theory (Neumann, 2013).

Practitioners are indeed the key to supporting critical change (Neumann, 2013) through their important role, which Giroux (1989) suggests could further develop through critical engagement within the classroom as well as larger movements geared towards social change. Many teacher educators have reportedly worked to increase cultural awareness among teacher candidates through use of critical pedagogical principles based in the anticipated value it will

hold in their future classrooms (Major & Celedon-Pattichis, 2011). Critical pedagogy holds practicality in today's classrooms (Neumann, 2013), with practitioners shaping critical pedagogy through the contexts of their own rooms, with consideration for their students, subjects, and personal needs (Monchinski, 2008). Practitioners balance many factors while working to support their students (Neumann, 2013). As practitioners develop into critical educators, problem-posing connected to student diversity, including race, gender, and class (McLaren, 2017) become common-place practice, supporting the understanding that both practical and social applications are needed for impact and change (Neumann, 2013). These practical and social applications for educational practice may be developed through critical pedagogy's key concepts: critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness.

Professional Learning Based in Critical Reflection

There is a misconception among many teaching professionals that simply thinking about teaching equates to quality reflection (Grant & Gillete, 2006). Unfortunately, this does not describe the purpose and depth of critical reflection. An easy way of understanding what critical reflection entails is to consider it as a combination of critical inquiry and self-reflection (Brown, 2004). Based in identifying and challenging assumptions, (Baily et al., 2014), critical reflection is a method for practitioners to vitally examine personal beliefs (Brown, 2006) that may impact worldviews (Baily et al., 2014), perceptions, and practices (Brown, 2006). As practitioners' beliefs influence professional practice (Brown, 2006), critical analysis of professional action is needed (Baily et al., 2014) in correlation to increased personal awareness. When effectively utilized within professional learning contexts, critical reflection can lead to perspective transformation (Brown, 2006) and ultimately, transformative personal and professional development (Baily et al., 2014).

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Based in investigation of the tradition and practice of hegemonic norms as assumptions, as well as the examination of power structures (Brown, 2004), critical reflection is not intended to result in the identification new individuals to blame for societal issues (Shields, 2004). Instead, critical reflection affords educators the opportunity for generalized awareness of social injustice (Bondy et al., 2017) in addition to a look inward toward one's role as an individual. Critical pedagogy, as praxis, requires "reflection and reconceptualization between what goes on in our classrooms, why it goes on, and what and whose ends are served" (Monchinski, 2008, p. 1). Critical reflection is in fact an 'action' (Freire, 2000), and, after obtaining greater self-understanding, the influences on one's teaching (Grant & Gillete, 2006) may be revealed. The potential transformation among practitioners, both personal and professional, through critical reflection makes way for meaningful perspective changes, with the intent of improved social awareness. Although critical reflection signifies a personal commitment of examination, it can be bolstered through application of other critical practices and experiences, such as critical dialogue and critical consciousness.

Professional Learning Based in Critical Dialogue

Use of critical dialogue serves as both an application and an expansion of critical reflection. While critical dialogue can encompass both internal and external dialogue, (Baily et al., 2014), it should aim to establish participants in subjective rather than objective roles (Kholi et al., 2015) that are non-combative and inclusive (Bondy et al., 2017), utilizing critical questioning to expand knowledge (Baily et al., 2014) to specifically expose participants to varied perspectives and worldviews (Shields, 2004). It is not intended to establish shared understanding or consensus, "but rather, deeper and richer understandings of our own biases, as well as where our colleagues are coming from on particular issues and how each of us differently constructs

those issues" (Brown, 2006, p. 709). When practitioners can be communicative and responsive to one another (Kohli et al., 2015), there is opportunity for dialogue to move people beyond fear or avoidance (Shields, 2004) to a shared social process (Brown, 2004) that supports recognition of various viewpoints, as well as active roles of power and privilege (Baily, et al., 2014).

While critical dialogue is a powerful tool, it is one that benefits from thoughtful planning and consideration. As critical dialogue remains grounded in inclusion, respect, and intent for social justice (Shields, 2004), it may naturally lead towards a shared development of social consciousness (Kohli et al., 2015). Critical dialogue provides practitioners with opportunity to model democracy (Monchinski, 2008) and support a process of people teaching people, with shared responsibility for growth (Freire, 2000). It is through dialogue that educators may begin to recognize their role as agents of social justice, which leads to engagement in sociocultural issues (Brown, 2006). Emerging from development in areas such as critical reflection and critical dialogue, another vital component of critical pedagogy may be fostered: critical consciousness.

Professional Learning Based in Critical Consciousness

Building on the foundation of critical reflection and critical dialogue, critical consciousness offers even greater expansion on gained insight and understanding related to SJE. Freire (2000) describes the importance of critical consciousness through recognition of its intentionality. Critical consciousness may be understood as the development of personal awareness in relation to cultural norms and values, as well as social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995), acknowledging oppressive educational realties (Kohli et al., 2015). Recognizing and challenging one's assumptions and beliefs requires conscious awareness of those areas (Webster-Wright, 2009), which is often the initial challenge as beliefs are typically ingrained on a subconscious level (Shields, 2004). While social conflict often displays dehumanizing traits,

critical consciousness allows for practitioners to create humanizing learning atmospheres (DeMulder et al, 2009), evolving beyond an acceptance for the status quo (Baily et al., 2014).

Critical consciousness development among practitioners is intended to support social action (Brown, 2006; Burns Thomas, 2007) and transformation (Brown, 2006). In a workforce which maintains a White majority background (Gay, 2018; Grant & Gillete, 2006), many professionals in K-12 education have had little experience with communities of color (Grant & Gillete, 2006; Pollack, 2012), often accepting ingrained stereotypes and deficit mindsets (Pollack, 2012). Therefore, practitioners benefit from the development of critical consciousness toward implementing and supporting SJE through improved recognition of educational realities experienced by students (Dover, 2009). Use of critical reflection and critical dialogue supports the progression of critical consciousness, as professionals may begin to apply increased personal awareness and perspective transformation into social action and advocacy.

A critical pedagogy framework for developing K-12 practitioners in acclimating SJE concepts is firmly supported through varied critical processes, including the key components of reflection, dialogue, and consciousness discussed here. This framework is especially vital due to the professional needs faced by K-12 practitioners regarding social justice concerns within today's schools and classrooms. While a critical pedagogy framework establishes opportunity for practitioner development and impact, there remains a need to examine the criticisms facing critical pedagogy as it applies to practice. Examination of criticism is done in hopes of revealing opportunity for continued development towards effective implementation for the modern practitioner.

Recognizing Critiques of Critical Pedagogy in Education

Critical pedagogy, held in high regard among academic writings, unfortunately is often considered disconnected from K-12 education (Neumann, 2013). As with all pedagogies, there are areas of concern and criticism (Monchinski, 2008). A core concern is the limitation of language and consideration for context (Neumann, 2013) observed in criticalists' disconnection from practitioners and their classrooms. Disconnection is observed through the limited scope of delivery, with communication directed "at" practitioners without regard for personal contexts (Neumann, 2013), while also demanding engagement and risk-taking (Monchinski, 2008). Weiner (2007) also went so far as to say the targeted audience for critical pedagogy are the privileged rather than the oppressed, emphasizing the limitation of access to those in advanced educational programs (Weiner, 2007). Despite these valid concerns, critical pedagogy does offer practicality (Neumann, 2013) as it connects practitioners with helpful tools (Monchinski, 2008). While it may require new and accommodating approaches for practitioner use (Neumann, 2013) with consideration for various classrooms and contexts, it is important to consider critical pedagogy as an evolving pedagogy, with room for progress (Monchinski, 2008). As critical pedagogical concepts continue in development to serve practitioners, specific applications of SJE can be found in culturally responsive teaching practices, continuing the journey of purposeful work with SJE through cultural competency in classrooms.

Culturally Responsive Classrooms: Supporting Social Justice Education Through Pedagogical Practice

A study conducted with urban school leaders (Khalil & Brown, 2015) found one of the vital traits of a reflective practitioner included the ability to articulate and demonstrate cultural competency, including areas of awareness, experience, communication, and understanding.

Considering that schools include a variable assortment of cultural identities and experiences (Khalil & Brown), there is great concern in practitioners' ability to navigate social realities with limited understanding or lived knowledge. This can lead to the potential avoidance or acknowledgement of controversial topics due to discomfort or fear of conflict (Samuels, 2018). Fortunately, there is cause for hope in connecting culturally competent forms of teaching to positive student outcomes (Samuels, 2018) and experiences. Understood as a teaching pedagogy (Hsiao, 2015) based in a student-centered approach (Samuels et al., 2017), culturally responsive teaching recognizes students' cultural experiences and backgrounds throughout the learning process (Samuels, 2018). Training practitioners in cultural responsiveness promotes engagement and achievement for all students (Khalil & Brown, 2015; Samuels, 2018), while also supporting improved classroom climate and culture (Samuels, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching "is characterized by teachers who are committed to cultural competence and students who can maintain their cultural identities and integrity while flourishing in the educational context" (Samuels et al., 2017, p. 51).

During the 2017-2018 school year there was an estimated 50.7 million students entering public schooling programs in the United States, ages Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Out of those students, there were only 24.4 million [approximately] who were White. The remaining 26.3 million were comprised of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska native students, and students of two or more races (Riser-Kositsky, 2021). The Department of Education's 2015-2016 Schools and Staffing Survey reports that approximately 80% of the teacher work force are White (Education Week, 2017). When considering the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences (Hansen-Thomas & Chennapragada, 2018) implied between practitioners and students, reasonable concern may be found in questioning the ability of teachers

to effectively teach their increasingly diverse student population. Culturally responsive teaching is an approach to teaching that is student centered (Samuels, 2018) and maintains cultural relevancy, relating to students and their experiences (Irvine, 2010). This approach is multi-dimensional and promotes equitable learning and excellence (Gay, 2018; Samuels et al., 2017). Culturally responsive work in the classroom "is connected to the larger field of multicultural education, but highlights not just inclusiveness of curriculum, but how to validate students lived experiences, negotiate change, and promote advocacy in the current social and political contexts" (Samuels et al., 2017, p. 51). As its design is based on fostering quality and engaging focus on equitable learning, it touts successful outcomes when utilized effectively by practitioners. With components considered good for all learners (Bassey, 2016), culturally responsive practitioners are developing students who are not only achieving academic success but are demonstrating sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence (Warren, 2013).

Cultural responsiveness within teaching is observed when practitioners unite exceptional pedagogy with the goal of equity (Stembridge, 2020). Consider culturally responsive teaching as instruction where the intention of practitioners is centered on effective instruction guided by a multiethnic cultural framework (Gay, 2018), which is also multi-disciplinary in action (Stembridge, 2020). Stembridge (2020) identifies culturally responsive education (CRE) as an overarching "framework for how we define excellent pedagogy with particular attention to gaps in performance and achievement between sub-groups" (p. 5). Seminal authors on culturally based education models includes works from Gloria Ladson-Billings, Sonia Nieto, and Geneva Gay. Each of these matriarchs focused their work on effective pedagogical practice towards greater support of marginalized student groups, though each provide distinctive contributions to the field (Stembridge, 2020) of both study and practice. Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) studied

effective educational practices which supported achievement among African American students, and she did so through the lens of opposing culturally neutral pedagogy, with the model of culturally relevant pedagogy. Sonia Nieto (1999, 2000) followed this with her work on culturally responsive pedagogy, with qualifying pedagogical methods including rigor, adaptability, and inclusivity in learning design (Stembridge, 2020). Finally, this study aligns most directly to Gay's model of culturally responsive teaching, though shared characteristics exist between the varying educational models. Gay's (2018) work has maintained a global influence and recommends engagement on multiple levels for improved student achievement and learning to occur. Gay (2018) also suggests that student achievement should be considered within academic, social, psychological, and emotional realities, extending throughout students' educational experience, as well as within all content learning. As cultural responsiveness within teaching requires practitioners pursue continued understanding of both content opportunities as well as student's personal cultural identities (Stembridge, 2020), there must be continued opportunity and efforts towards professional learning (Gay, 2018). Practitioners' lack preparation for effective and responsive work with diverse student groups (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020), while school improvements and student progress demand practitioners demonstrate "comprehensive knowledge, unshakeable convictions, and high-level pedagogical skills" (Gay, 2018, p. xxvi). To build greater knowledge and skill sets, opportunity for professional access must expand to standardized forms of understanding and familiarity with these concepts through a more standardized system of discourse.

Building a Discourse for Success

Culturally responsive teaching provides practitioners with a shared approach as well as shared language to begin the journey of supporting equity for all learners. Key concepts required for effective implementation of culturally responsive teaching includes empathy, high expectations for all learners, and mindful applications of students' cultures and backgrounds within instructional content and learning structures. Additionally, practitioners engaging in culturally responsive work will recognize alignment to contexts and language found within professional growth grounded in critical pedagogy concerning intentional reflection (Stembridge, 2020) and increased consciousness over cultural influences impacting teaching and learning (Gay, 2018).

While culturally responsive teaching has become a global concept that has crossed various professional fields (Gay, 2018), quality professional learning for K-12 practitioners centered on diverse learner supports is far from standardized (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020). Samuels' (2018) study, as discussed previously, examined in-service teachers' perspectives associated with culturally responsive practices. This study not only demonstrated professional needs associated with practitioners' limitations based in classroom demands and access to resources and strategies. It also revealed a strong lack of confidence on the part of teachers to engage in dialogue over cultural aspects that feel too controversial or uncomfortable for teachers, ultimately leading to overall avoidance. This underscores a reality where practitioners require assistance in developing the strategies and language for culturally responsive work in the classroom. To begin to develop practitioners for culture responsiveness, the disconnect between theory and practice (Samuels et al., 2017) may be supported through practical applications of critical pedagogy (Neumann, 2013) as well as the

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tools supported through culturally responsive teaching (Stembridge, 2020). However, context is critical in supporting implementation (Neumann, 2013). Connecting theory to practice requires consideration for all aspects of the practitioner's day: "what they teach, where they teach, who they teach, and perhaps most importantly, what they are comfortable teaching" (Neumann, 2013, p. 143). Considering acceptance of hegemony (van Dijk, 1993) within educational systems, issues of language and their associated meanings cannot be taken for granted (Taylor, 1997). To better support practitioner's knowledge construction and professional interpretations (van Dijk, 1993) related to cultural competency, consideration for the discourse associated with critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching may be carefully reviewed, with additional care for the role context affords to affecting meaning of said discourse (Gee, 2011). The myriad educational policies and documents, including professional standards and requirements, curriculum resources, as well as professional development expectations, present practitioners with a wealth of information to support professional practice. As Gee (2011) explains, there is an assumption of shared understanding between those providing the information and those consuming it. Mindful of effective practice being informed through culturally responsive habits of thinking (Stembridge, 2020), it is important to connect the language of culturally responsive teaching and critical pedagogy to educational policy and document resources. Examining these forms of professional discourse aids practitioners through direct connection to what they both know as well as what they strive to accomplish (Stembridge, 2020). Exploring educational discourse allows for insight into how practitioners use and understand the concepts (Taylor, 1997) of culturally responsive teaching and critical pedagogy. Investigation of the construction of discourse offers opportunity to demonstrate opportunity for developing practitioners with the

overall goal of social justice education through improved cultural competency and learning for all.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored social justice education through the lens of current K-12 classrooms, with careful examination of the professional needs facing practitioners. Key literature in core concepts is noted below in Figure 2.2. Utilizing policy to determine both the language of and expectation for professional responsibilities was explored, relating educational policy as an integral area within supporting professional learning needs. In response to professional learning deficits, critical pedagogy was proposed as an ideal theoretical framework to guide professional development towards better support of all learners, prioritizing work with marginalized student groups. Consideration for culturally responsive teaching was also reviewed as a practical and effective method for supporting social justice education through a rigorous and multidimensional approach to teaching, which provides meaningful discourse construction in partnership with critical pedagogy.

Figure 2.2.

Core Concepts Demonstrated Through Literature Review

In connecting social justice education and professional realities, construction of the analysis over educational policy informed through critical pedagogical components and language based in social justice concepts may begin. The following chapter will explore the study methodology, connecting study insights found within the review of literature.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This section is intended to describe the study's applied methodology. Research purpose and the study's foundational research questions are reviewed, with consideration for the methodological and theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis. Research design is then discussed, including the educational policy and document selection, considerations taken with data collection, data management and analysis including coding procedures based in critical discourse analysis and qualitative research, as well as data representation. The chapter is concluded with a review of ethical practices and study limitations.

Purpose and Research Questions

Today's practitioners must work through increased demands driven by "accountability legislation, shifts in rigorous content standards, and the increasing diversity of students in the classroom. Each of these factors are compounded by and responsive to the others" (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020, p. 35). With consideration for the various factors at play, qualitative research through critical inquiry offers a supportive method for exploring practitioners' professional needs with the hope of gaining better understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) towards improved educational realities.

The purpose of this research was to examine formal expectations and professional learning components for K-2 practitioners with consideration for social justice education in the public-school structure. Through a critical pedagogy lens, the researcher specifically examined policy and formal educational documents through the Kansas State Department of Education to

understand and consider the social justice and critical learning components needed for practitioners to accomplish their work. Research questions and explanation of purpose are noted below:

1. What language is used to formally address concepts of social justice education within K-2 professional policies?

a. How are concepts of critical pedagogy situated within K-2 policies?

2. What professional expectations are established within the Kansas Department of Education's professional policies to support the facilitation of purposeful professional learning outcomes based in social justice educational concepts among K-2 practitioners?

The purpose of research Question 1 was to recognize the current language utilized within educational policy for social justice content within K-2 professional communities. Aimed at identifying formal communication of expectation, explicit terminology, content range, context, and potential gaps were considered.

Question 1a was based in the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and its impact on effective learning based in critical social issues and critical social awareness. The question is aimed to understand the depth of effective policy and training available to K-12 practitioners. The research analysis included examination of discourse related to critical social concepts containing culturally responsive teaching.

Question 2 explored the opportunity available, through formal documentation and policy, for K-2 practitioners to engage in effective professional learning which supports social justice concepts and school contexts. This was examined with consideration for what is expected practice as well as expected professional learning.

To effectively fulfil the research purpose, examination of methodological and theoretical frameworks was established through considerations of related literature and research. The changing educational landscape's policies, content standards, and increasingly heterogenic student population (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020) were each acknowledged throughout the study framework, optimizing qualitative measures towards inquiry with potential for social impact (Denzin, 2017).

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

With consideration for targeted educational research related to social justice and professional learning, the theoretical framework is based in critical pedagogy, with critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis as the selected methodology for research design. Critical inquiry is "oriented toward the interests of marginalized social groups, emancipatory, uses intellectual effort to work toward a more just society" (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 208). With roots in critical theory, which critiques social structures, norms, and inequalities, applying critical theory to methodology supports a social justice orientation within research (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Denzin (2017) describes critical scholars as "committed to showing how the practice of critical, interpretive qualitative research can help change the world in positive ways" (p. 12). As critical research is inherently supportive of social justice (Crotty, 1998), it considers the impact of various systems and the presence of inequity (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004) among them. While there are multiple components to critical research design, the trait present within the context of this study was the connection of meaning to realities of social power and control in relation to large systems and structures (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004) with the goal of supporting social change (Crotty, 1998).

In implementing a critical inquiry methodology focused on policy analysis, data collection centered on specific policy and document review. Research questions were designed with the study's theoretical framework in mind (Bhattacharya, 2017), supporting the study purpose through critical pedagogy. Marrying both theoretical and methodological frameworks, critical pedagogy concepts were supported through use of critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis. Prunty (1985) emphasizes the imperative work of educational policy analysis to attend to both the functions of school as well as society. This study aims to aid in understanding common place policies and practices (Chase et al., 2014), though the researcher acknowledges a wide array of policy is available, beyond the scope of daily or typical practitioner review. With analysis including exploration of discourse as a mediator of teaching and learning (Fairclough, 2011), strategies for critical policy analysis are reviewed and selected according to study context and policy/document selection. A pilot study was conducted in order to apply a critical policy analysis through critical discourse analysis methodology. The pilot study focused on a singular curriculum document, CCR K-2 HGSS Curriculum Standards. The express purpose of the pilot study was to conduct coding which identified language related to social justice education, considering explicit content and educational practices connected with the phrasing identified. The pilot study provided the researcher with insight on opportunities to expand coding strategies and document selection to support thorough study investigation and analysis.

Critical Pedagogy

In consideration of both the research topic and intent, the theoretical framework is based in critical pedagogy. With the intention of addressing power and equity, critical pedagogy fosters practitioner reflection over professional and pedagogical habits (Khan Vlach et al., 2019). Freire

observes critical reflection as a vital component to transformation (Brown, 2004), which supports the vision of educational systems working towards inclusivity, equity, and democracy (Shields, 2010).

Critical pedagogy is comprised of critical practices including critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness, which each serve as foundational components of teaching for social justice (Dover, 2009). Critical pedagogy also explores the complexity over marginalized students' academic struggles within the current educational system (Darder et al., 2017). Challenging the conditions that shape how schools operate (Kirylo & Thirumurthy, 2010), critical pedagogy emphasizes question-posing over educational processes and structures, including practitioner-based exploration over hegemonic practices as well as examination of curriculum and professional practice (Darder et al., 2017).

Critical Policy Discourse Analysis

Educational policy analysis is associated with the transmission of values and moral imperatives (Prunty, 1985) which offers a commitment to social justice (Taylor, 1997). While the term 'policy' is often considered ambiguous (Prunty, 1985), this study defines policy as text-based procedural and regulative statements which utilizes language focused on communicating an ideal (Edmondson, 2004) and an expectation of professional practice. Additionally, policies used for this analysis were broadened to various types of documents found within organizational and institutional files (Bowen, 2009). Edmondson (2004) takes careful steps to review important components of policy, including two assumptions (p. 14):

1. Policy is socially constructed and produced at a particular time and place and is, therefore, subject to social, economic, and political influences of the times; and

2. Participants in policy events are members of various discourse groups with distinct values and interests offering a wide variety of opinions

Policy analysis should be both rigorous (Taylor, 1985) as well as supportive of advocacy through evaluation of policy and the analysis of its contents (Prunty, 1985). Policy research is especially beneficial for K-12 practitioners, supporting greater understanding for policy processes (Taylor, 1997).

The roles of "power, values, ideals, and personal interests" (Edmondson, 2004, p. 14) are at play in policy design. Understanding policy's origins and connection to Edmondson's (2004) assumptions allows for not only increased insight into policy study, but also recognition for the need of policy examination through a critical lens. Critical policy study "investigates the values in policy, policymaking, and policy implementation" (Edmondson, 2004, p. 18). Critical policy study supports meaningful consideration and examination of the values and contradictions present within policy (Edmondson, 2004). Critical policy study aims to examine policy effectiveness, the values embedded within, the social consequences held, as well as what need the policy was based in (Edmondson, 2004). In raising questions over policy, specifically its [social and political] origins and who benefits from it (Edmondson, 2004), critical understanding may occur in support of effective implementation or, more likely, the recognition of need for change. This study acknowledges the ability of policy to manifest itself through educational structures and processes (Prunty, 1985), and the researcher strived to conduct the investigation through a systematic review and analysis over selected educational policies and documents. Recognizing there are myriad activities which could be considered policy analysis (Prunty, 1985), this approach may be enhanced through consideration for discourse within policy

implementation, supporting a detailed analysis which prioritizes language within policy texts (Taylor, 1997).

Discourse analysis is useful within policy research as it considers policy implementation through context and how the words are read (Taylor, 1997). Based on details found within speech and text, discourse analysis is the study of language (Gee, 2014). Serving as a problem-oriented analysis (Pini, 2011), critical discourse analysis offers opportunity to examine knowledge construction through forms of text and talk (van Dijk, 1993) with a prioritized examination of how language constructs practices, values, and processes (Kress, 2011).

While there are varying approaches to critical discourse analysis (Pini, 2011), it can be used to help practitioners understand social realties of schools, including the influence of beliefs and values which are found within educational language and texts (Anderson & Mungal, 2015). Critical discourse studies are especially valuable within educational research considering its social-commitment and ability to gauge socio-cultural perspectives (Pini, 2011) through examination of the role language and discourse plays in connection to these productions (van Dijk, 1993). Using critical discourse analysis within policy analysis allows for exploration of values and educational goals (Woodside-Jiron, 2011) in unison with a methodology which permits description and interpretation over the relationships found within the discourse (Rogers, 2011) examined. Texts can have causal effects on practitioners, including areas such as beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Fairclough, 2011), which was operationalized within this study as a median to explore greater understanding for educational processes (Kress, 2011) that shape and influence professional practice.

Research Design

Upon determination of the study's theoretical framework and overall methodology, the research design was developed with specific consideration for data collection and the methods used for data management and analysis. As Bhattacharya (2017) notes, steps within qualitative research may evolve and adjust according to researchers' needs and justifications, which should be considered thoughtfully and with regard to supporting credibility and meaningful findings. In this study, investigation into educational policies and documents through critical policy discourse analysis was developed to consider the targeted research questions.

This study aimed to illuminate educational practices which demonstrate practitioner learning needs associated with social justice education. While concerns over pedagogy and teaching is often left to educational leaders (Woodside-Jiron, 2011), the distinctive language used within the examined educational texts allowed for greater understanding for how practitioners consider and interpret (Gee, 2011) the expected professional practices being investigated. Applying a theoretical frame through critical pedagogy, and then selection of appropriate correlating methods such as critical policy discourse analysis allowed for optimization on the textual approach (Rogers, 2011) to supporting this study's educational research intentions.

In order to meet study objectives, the research design implemented thoughtful policy selection, with purposeful alignment between policy supporting the research topic as well as relevancy to K-2 practitioners. K-2 was determined as an appropriate study scope in order to accommodate the number of policies for this study. When resolving grade levels for inclusion, the researcher applied understanding of grade spans as outlined by KSDE, which are outlined as

Pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 (Kansas State Department of Education, 2020). Removing Pre-K from the study's scope and focusing on K-2 was based in the standardized presence of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade classrooms within Kansas elementary schools.

In the following sections, additional study decisions are discussed. Once policy selection and data collection were determined, procedures for reviewing the data sources, leading to effective and meaningful analysis is reviewed. Data representation is examined, regarding findings. Finally, the researchers' role and ethical standards are provided to support study trustworthiness and standards of practice.

Policy Selection and Data Collection

While many things may be considered for data in qualitative study (Bhattacharya, 2017), this research requires policy and formal documentation for examination and analysis. Bowen (2009) identifies researcher priorities should include the determination of document and policy relevance to the research topic, as well as ensure the selected texts maintain the ability to provide background information and context. This study recognizes consideration over what data is selected should prioritize the study's theoretical framework (Taylor, 1997), which is critical pedagogy. The researcher observed limited policy based fully in K-2 social justice educational practices, and therefore educational policy and curriculum documents will be selected based in related teaching competencies and content knowledge. While policies include information that spans K-12 applications, focus was taken on K-2 components when necessary, to maintain a focused review based in the scope of this study.

In order to support the expectation of robust data collection within qualitative research (Bowen, 2009), care was taken in policy selection for the sake of effective data collection

methods. The researcher considered the complex policy matrix practitioners must navigate (Committee on Understanding the Changing Structure of the K-12 Workforce, 2020) on a daily basis, and effort was made to select policy based on meaningful contribution to both the research topic as well as practitioners. Policy selection for this study is outlined in Table 3.1.

Selection of specific policies for this study was made with understanding for the value of having an array of data to support trustworthiness through a variety of sources and information (Bowen, 2009). To obtain qualifying policy information for analysis, the decision was made to utilize electronic documents, which is an acceptable material form for analysis (Bowen, 2009). Data was collected and analyzed from the Kansas Department of Education website (KSDE.org), as it is considered an official form of educational information as a state-wide educational authority with accessible online resources for certified practitioners and Kansas schools. Data collection included all data sources provided in the policy selection table listed in Table 3.1. Determination of appropriate data for this study was based on documents and policies with association to study objectives, including curriculum content and learning standards with correlations with social justice education, institutional educator expectations and evaluations, as well as guidelines for professional learning. Acknowledgement over context policy extending to the year of creation, alongside current events at that period, add to understanding for policy. Years of policy creation or adoption are additionally noted in Table 3.1, with n.d. noted when no date was provided. Data collection also included use of a reflective journal utilized by the researcher, to support development of findings for analysis. The journal was used throughout each stage of coding and analysis and included researcher decisions and insights along with reflective questions over study components.

Table 3.1.

Policy Selection Matrix

Policy Selected	Data Analyzed
Kansas Professional Development Program (PDC) Guidelines (2008)	- Kansas Professional Education Standards - National Standards for Staff Development - Staff development rubrics and examples - Explanations over results-based staff development - Explanations over district, school, and individual professional development - Leadership and Professional Development Councils - Needs assessments - Goals of professional development - Staff development strategies - Planning and design for professional development *Omitted from analysis: Table of contents; Glossary; Appendix A: Kansas Licensure Renewal Regulations; Appendix C: Quality Performance Accreditation Regulation; Bibliography*
KEEP (Kansas Educator Evaluation Protocol) (2014)	Teacher evaluation rubrics: Construct 1-Learner and Learning Construct 2-Content Knowledge Construct 3-Instructional Practice Construct 4-Professional Responsibility
K-12 English Language Arts Standards (2017)	- Overview of document - Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade Standards and all associated components (progression of standards, options for practice, related long-term learning goals) *Omitted from analysis: Standards for grades 3-12*
Math Standards (2017)	- Overview of document and Standards development - Rose Capacities and Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development Model Standards - Mathematics learning progressions and teaching practices - Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade Standards *Omitted from analysis: Standards for grades 3-8 and 'High School' Standards; Student and Teacher Glossaries; Tables; Sample of Words Consulted*
Kansas History Government and Social Studies (HGSS) Standards (2020)	- Overview of document and special acknowledgements - Mission Statement - Standards and Benchmarks - Effective HGSS Classroom Practices - Suggested scope and sequence - Instructional steps for higher learning - Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade Standards and all associated components (Focus Standards, course descriptions, past/future learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, suggestions for content and instruction, academic and personal competencies, resources, integration, and more) - Glossary of terms *Omitted from analysis: Standards for grades 3-5th, Middle School, and High School*
Kansans Can Civic Engagement Fact Sheet (n.d.)	- Background statements over Kansans Can Civic Engagement development - Mission Statement for HGSS Standards - Definitions for Civic Engagement terms 'Schools Can' instructional practices - Statements on building self-efficacy
10 Mostly Instructional Practices to Improve Civic Engagement in Any Classroom (n.d.)	Policy content including instructional practices and explanatory statements *Omitted from analysis: active links to additional webpages as additive 'Resources'*

Data Management and Analysis

There are many considerations in data analysis, including the ability for the analysis to reflect the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, literature, and research design present. Bhattacharya (2017) observes that "data analysis involves creating processes that would allow for deep insights" (p. 149), which aligns to the consideration for meaningful processes within data steps throughout the study. Once all documents were collected, study procedures were initiated through organization of data sources. NVivo software was utilized in support of maintaining organized data sources through a study catalog, as well as support coding efforts. The initial analytical procedures allowed for appraising and synthesizing the information (Bowen, 2009). Gee's (2014) tools for discourse analysis permitted the researcher to ask questions over the data, while Saldana's (2016) coding practices supported a close examination of the policies and documents to reveal insights, patterns, and themes connecting the data to study questions. Considering analysis involved a combination of steps regarding actual policy review, including superficial as well as thorough examination prior to interpretation (Bowen, 2009), each of the pieces of data collected were reviewed multiple times through various coding exercises for careful review of content as well as language.

Utilizing NVivo & Extensive Research Journals

NVivo software was utilized to ensure quality coding practices within policy examinations. The software allowed for the researcher to save all codes and notes for each policy, within files for each coding round. Additionally, coding rounds four and five made use of previous coding conducted, which was easily reviewed through software features. The researcher utilized a researcher journal, which was updated for each policy throughout the first three rounds, and then for overall notes and observations for the following two rounds. Here the researcher

added notes on insights, the addition of codes, insight into coding themes, as well as questions

for researcher reflection and potential future consideration. This allowed the researcher to

maintain an organized and efficient process for accessing research components and retain records

of work conducted. The researcher journal as well as saved coding files on NVivo software was

actively referred throughout the analysis to maintain clarity over findings and insights.

Coding Analysis

In order to support critical discourse analysis' focus on language as a tool for mediating

power (Rogers et al., 2005), the tools selected for this research directly reflect the researcher's

intention to question the data in specific, meaningful ways (Gee, 2014). Each coding tool, as

outlined in Figure 3.1, established a different opportunity to examine the data.

Figure 3.1.

Coding Rounds and Descriptions
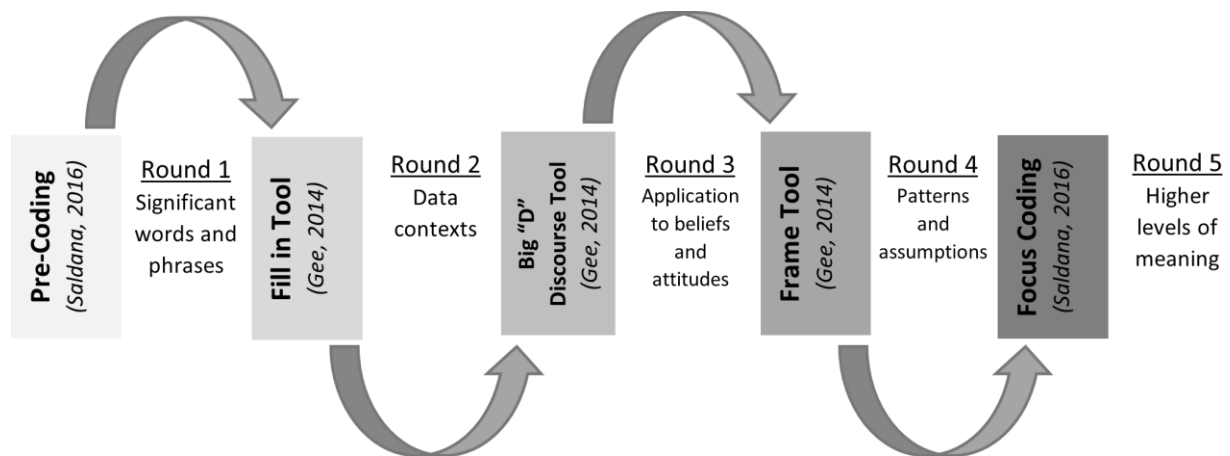
To initiate a review of study, a pre-coding exercise occurred with an initial viewing of the

sources, marking words and phrases that appeared significant (Saldana, 2016). This initial review

was also utilized to begin organizing analysis tools. Terminology and phrasing associated with

key research themes were developed prior to data collection, with the researcher amending codes

to include additional crucial and relative terms observed within policy phrasing. With codes

serving as prompts for reflective analysis of meanings (Saldana, 2016) found in data, the

researcher acknowledged a need to be responsive to data throughout the research procedures.

During this initial coding round, an extensive list of codes was developed based on the

researcher's first thorough review of the policies, which resulted in codes based in professional

learning, critical social components, and social justice education realities. Expanding on these

categorical insights, the transition was made to coding rounds with more targeted analysis tools

to support additional depth and insight. Bowen (2009) observes that any form of thematic

analysis requires careful and purposeful re-readings over the data. While critical discourse

analysis is utilized within the policy examination, it is important to observe that discourse may

be analyzed through multiple dimensions (Anderson & Mungal, 2015). Each close review

following the first round of coding, and prior to the final round, utilized a separate tool from

Gee's (2014) suggested methods for discourse analysis. The selected tools included Gee's "Fill

in Tool" centered on data contexts and analysis over what information required clarity according

to various knowledge systems; the "Big 'D' Discourse Tool" which was used to consider how

findings may apply to themes related to particular aspects of Discourse associated with socially

recognizable areas connected to values and beliefs, allowing for direct correlation to use of a

critical analysis framework, and finally, the "Frame Tool" which supported a summative review

of all data sources to collapse findings into patterns, as well as serve as an opportunity to adjust

researcher assumptions based on gained insight and exposure to various data sources. The Fill in

Tool provided codes based in establishing context for policy components, as well as identifying

areas where clarity was needed, or an assumption was being made in alignment to policy content.

The Big "D" Discourse tool revealed codes connected to differing Discourse lenses as well as

specific areas of language and phrasing related to social justice education and professional expectations. The Frame tool, which is supported as a follow-up analysis from previous coding (Gee, 2014), demonstrated several key areas the researcher needed to explore in order to ensure accurate understanding over findings as well as gauge potential areas of bias. With that in mind, this round focused on examination of policy components such as the Rose Capacities, Kansas values and KSDE, as well as required areas of staff training. Finally, focused coding (Saldana, 2016) was then utilized as a final coding exercise with the intention of evoking higher levels of meaning and connection building, allowing for final development of data themes which extend beyond discourse patterns, but still include a form of analysis which allows for the relation of categorical findings to the study's research questions (Bowen, 2009). Focused coding was selected over other options based on the flexibility allowed among the various elements (Saldana, 2016) which the researcher interpreted as ideal for the nuanced meanings and applications attached to social justice concepts. As a final form of analysis, while focused coding will be considered on all KSDE data sources, it will also include insights and observations found within the researcher's reflective journal. Initially, this final coding round was conducted with a thorough review of the researcher's reflective journal and all correlating codes. Then codes were sorted into larger categories aligned to research questions, with findings broken down into connected major themes and categories.

Data Representation

Once data collection and analysis concluded, the researcher demonstrated findings through visual aids, in addition to the provision of a coding breakdown. Following Gee's (2014) insights in discourse analysis, the researcher aligned processes to the particular needs of this study, and additional data analysis representations are presented within the findings located in

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chapter four. Here, data representation included coding breakdowns for each round, as well as a

review of the processes used with the coding tools. As Denzin and Lincoln (2013) observe, the

"interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political" (p. 55).

Prunty (1985) describes educational policy analysts as maintaining moral positions, warning

against neutrality. Study findings will aim to ensure meaningful review of findings based in

acknowledgement of research goals, attuned to the educational purposes with which the study

was intended.

The code breakdown for coding rounds one, two, and three are outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2.

Codes Used for Analysis: Rounds 1, 2, and 3

Codes Used for Analysis		
Round 1: Initial Coding *Significant words and phrases*	**Round 2: Fill in Tool** *Data contexts*	**Round 3: Big "D" Discourse** *Application to beliefs and attitudes*
Student Learning Expectations Social Activism SJE-Potential Opportunity SJE-Learner Accommodations SJE-Explicit Opportunity SJE-Diversity & Culture SJE-Diverse Learners Professional Reflection Professional Learning Professional Learning Terminology Professional Learning Promulgation(s) Professional Learning Goals Professional Learning Design Professional Learning Design-Points Professional Learning Design-Example Professional Learning Authorities Professional Knowledge Professional Expectation Professional Diversity Professional Application(s) Individual Professional Learning Educational Stakeholders Culturally Responsive Teaching Critical Social Values Critical Social Issues Critical Social Awareness Critical Reflection Critical Dialogue Collaborative Professional Learning	Policy Intention Knowledge Needed for Effective SJE Context-Student Learning Context-Responsible Parties for Professional Learning Context-Professional Learning Expectations Context-Professional Learning Component Context-Professional Expectation Context-Policy Makers and Participants Context-PL SIP RBSD Planning Context-Kansas' Students Long Term Success Context-Individual PD Plan Context-District-Agency PD Plan Context-District Responsibility Clarity Needed-Who is Responsible to Facilitate Clarity Needed-SJE Supported within This Learning Clarity Needed-District or School Responsibility to Facilitate Clarity Needed-Culturally Responsive Teaching as an Expected Component Assumption-Taught with SJE Application Assumption-Practitioners Know This and Actively Integrate Assumption-Practitioners Can Facilitate Their Growth Effectively Assumption-Practitioner Knowledge to Accommodate Student Demographics and Learning Needs	Umbrella Phrasing to Cover Effective Classroom Structures Umbrella Phrasing to Cover All Learners Including Ability and Diversity SJE Language Formal Educational Language-Professional Growth and Development Formal Educational Language-Evaluation Formal Educational Language-Critical Competencies Educational Depth Through Critical Pedagogy Discourse Lens-Influence Elementary VS Secondary Discourse Lens-Quality Parameters Professional Learning Discourse Lens-Kansans Discourse Lens-Critical Practices and Professional Learning Discourse Lens-Collaborative Professional Learning Discourse Lens-SJE or CRT Lens

These included rounds focused on significant words and phrases, data contexts, as well as application to beliefs and attitudes. Codes provided in Table 3.2 are additionally noted within the Appendix, along with a brief explanation for researcher application of each code. A demonstration of coding is provided in the following section, with examples from each of the first three rounds of coding analysis.

Coding round one was focused on identifying significant words and phrases. As the author was conducting the first close read of each policy, one of the coding phrases developed was *SJE-Potential Opportunity*. This code was used to code language in policy indicating opportunities for social justice education, based in content and professional practice components. Coding examples may be demonstrated through a look at two direct policy statements. When reviewing the English Language Arts Standards (2017), the Kindergarten Speaking and Listening standard SL.K.4 is based on students' ability to "use details to describe familiar people, places, things, and/or events with prompting and support." (p. 25). While this statement was not coded, the following options for addressing the standard were coded, including "To address this standard, students could: Use details to describe a family tradition or cultural custom; use details to describe people and places in their community" (p. 25). In addition to this example, the Math Standards (2019) include the Kansas Legislature's Rose Capacities mandate. One of the components of the Rose Capacitates coded with *SJE-Potential Opportunity* included the following: "Sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the students to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation" (p. 6).

Coding round two was based in data contexts, with an example code of *Context-Kansas' Students Long Term Success*. Application for this code focused on demonstrating policy context based in specific policy components on traits aligned to Kansas' values and the determination of

65

success in line with those values. Examples could be found in multiple policies, including the HGSS Standards and the Kansans Can Civic Engagement Fact Sheet. One such coded statement from the Kansans Can Civic Engagement Fact Sheet (n.d.) included "A successful Kansas high school graduate has the academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills and civic engagement to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation" (p. 1). An example of the same code within HGSS Standards (2020) is "A strong foundational knowledge of content is an essential part of creating a democratic citizen capable of being informed, thoughtful, and engaged in their world" (p. 26).

Finally, the last round demonstrated in Table 3.2 is round three coding, which was based in applying beliefs and attitudes, navigating areas of Discourse. One code from this round was *Educational Depth Through Critical Pedagogy*. This specific code was used with policy components indicating increased depth according to critical pedagogical components, including areas of reflection, dialogue, and consciousness. One example of this code is found in the KEEP (2014) policy, as Construct Four, based in professional responsibility states the following: "Creating and supporting learning environments that result in students achieving at the highest levels is a teacher's primary responsibility. To do this well, teachers must engage in professional self-renewal, which means they regularly examine their own and each other's practice through self-reflection and collaboration, providing collegial support and feedback that assures a continuous cycle of self-improvement" (p. 32). Additionally, the civic engagement document 10 Mostly Instructional Practices To Improve Civic Engagement in Any Classroom (n.d.), was coded with this as well, stating "Make uncomfortable the comfortable. Challenge their thinking, perceived realities, prejudices, and biases. Don't make it easy for confident/comfortable students

to slide by. Force them to confront their values and real world problems. Create cognitive dissonance" (p. 2). While these examples serve as a small snapshot of coding applications within Rounds one, two, and three, the are provided in the service of establishing understanding for researcher action within the methodology and study analysis.

The process for conducting coding round four is demonstrated in Figure 3.2, where the researcher utilized findings from the first three rounds to then determine opportunities for follow-up and support for framing understanding. This required examination of additional resources, including policy as well as webpages for evaluation of researcher assumptions.

Figure 3.2.

Frame Tool Description: Round 4
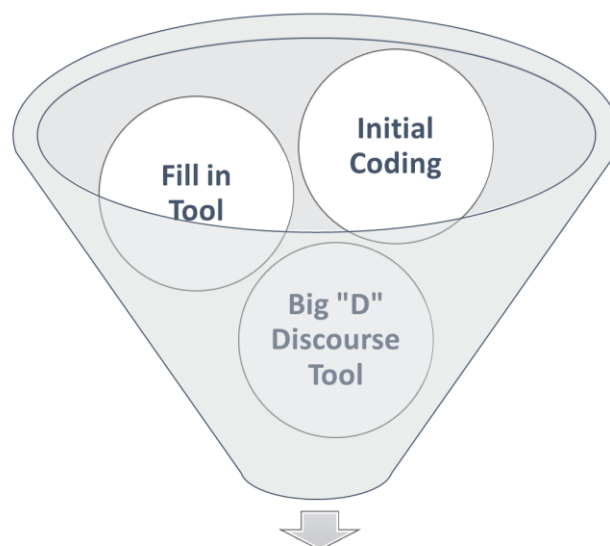
Frame Tool: Examination of additional resources to evaluate assumptions and determine patterns in findings. Researcher provides specific areas for additional examination, reasoning for follow-up, as well as pertinant findings.
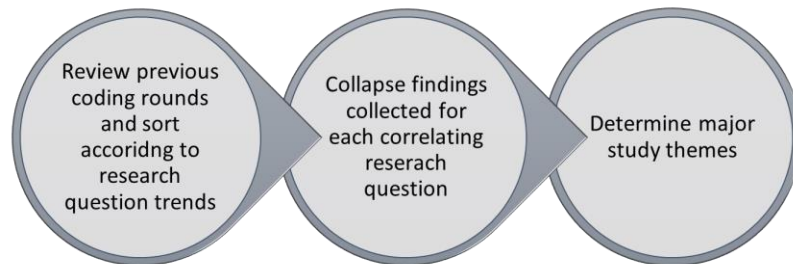
Coding round five is demonstrated in Figure 3.3. The final round of coding was intended to support the development of major themes in the research. A thorough discussion of findings will

follow in the next chapter, including additional breakdowns of policy language and codes

connected to study findings.

Figure 3.3.

Focused Coding Description: Round 5

Considering that findings are intended to lead to end goals which are not oriented in critique, as

"the end goal is to hope, to dream, and to create alternative realties that are based in equity, love,

peace, and solidarity" (Pini, 2011), study findings and coding significance are considerate of

study parameters. This includes consistent correlation to research questions and the ultimate

considerations of social justice education, educational policy, and professional learning for

today's educators.

Membership Role

The researcher, serving as a professional within the K-12 structure, brought career

experience and content knowledge into consideration throughout the study. As a certified K-6

elementary teacher within the state of Kansas, the decision for selection of study data sources

from the Kansas State Department of Education was connected to the researcher's professional

context and access. Recognizing the researcher's professional experiences as a practitioner,

purposeful steps were taken to ground analysis in literature. Additionally, findings were reflected

on throughout the research process to support differentiation between research bias and researcher awareness, while also striving to avoid acceptance of neutrality within policies and processes, aiming to fulfil appropriate positionality as a critical policy analyst (Prunty, 1985). The researcher acknowledges that good research is reflexive (Anderson & Mungal, 2015), and efforts were taken throughout the study to ensure personal awareness for construction of meaning as well as avoidance of personal influence over findings (Bowen, 2009).

Ethics

The researcher ensured steps were actively taken to demonstrate ethical processes within this study. Through the exclusion of live participants, ethical decision-making is centered on research processes as well as researcher bias. As noted previously within the subjectivity statement, the researcher disclosed a professional background directly related to the study and was committed to reflection and accountability in tracking observations and findings throughout the study through reflective journals. There were also intentional steps taken to select policy and documents that were publicly available for review and consumption. With mindful procedural ethics in place, value for accuracy may be observed (Tracy, 2010) and validated.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the study's research purpose was reviewed alongside the research questions. Methodological and theoretical frameworks were discussed as a means of examining the study's depth and processes. Finally, this chapter reviewed specific study design. The following chapters discuss findings within the data, as well as a review of what these findings mean with consideration for real-world implications and future research.

Chapter Four

In the following sections, study findings are reviewed, including graphic representations to add context and greater clarity, as well as major study themes. In conducting a critical policy discourse analysis, coding rounds will be reviewed as central to discussing findings, as well as additional components of data collection and analysis. Findings are discussed with direct alignment to core research concepts including a review of findings connected to the language used to address SJE, the presence and application of critical pedagogy, as well as opportunities for professional learning related to SJE and professional expectations. Findings connected to SJE and language include language communicating culturally responsive teaching practices, coded language used to indicate support for all learners, as well as use of language to communicate an appearance of values through SJE language and concepts. Findings connected to critical pedagogical concepts include alignment to what is demonstrated as Kansas values, as well as implied presence of critical pedagogy within professional knowledge and practice. Finally, findings focused on professional learning opportunities revealed inferred SJE practices, such as culturally responsive instruction, in addition to support for the integration of civic behaviors within instruction.

Data and Analysis

Data was collected directly from the KSDE website, ksde.org. Each individual policy was downloaded for use within the research. During the fourth round of coding, additional sources were reviewed from KSDE to support analysis. Coding was supported through software and researcher journals. Policy review included five separate coding rounds, as outlined in chapter three. Following the intent of each tool for analysis, each policy was carefully reviewed and analyzed for meaningful findings.

Policy Review: Coding Rounds

As each round of coding was based in strategic examination of the study's research questions, tools were not only selected based on the ability to honor research intent, but also on the prioritized methodology of critical policy discourse. The researcher considered all codes included within the analysis, as well as the frequency of code use and the number of policies which included them. Discourse analysis allows for many approaches (Rogers et al., 2005), and this study focused on using the analysis tools to meet the study's demands within language analysis (Gee, 2014). In order to be clear over research choices within a multi-layered analysis (Rogers et al., 2005), the findings include a careful review of the language contributing to understanding, following Gee's (2014) instruction to give care and attention to the details of language. Articulation of findings will include graphic representations of the language analysis and applied discourse analysis tools. The research focused on coding rounds which included multiple close reads of the included policies selected for examination. During round one's pre-coding, important words and phrases were noted (Saldana, 2016). These are noted in Table 4.1. Through this round, high frequency codes included *Professional Application(s)*, *Professional Expectations*, *Student Learning Expectations*, and *SJE Potential Opportunity*, and *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. Each of these codes held varying impact on study insights. *Professional Application(s)*, *Professional Expectations*, and *Student Learning Expectations* were each used to code phrases connected to concepts related to professional practice. Each of these were explored further to examine connection to Research Question 2. Codes *SJE Potential Opportunity* and *Culturally Responsive Teaching* may apply to each of the research questions. Also considered were the number of policies that held words and phrases connected to the determined codes, demonstrating prioritized focus among the various documents. Each code and correlating policy

were carefully documented. Rounds of codes and frequencies are integral to articulating the

findings within discourse analysis research.

Table 4.1.

Round One Codes and Frequencies

Coding Round 1: Pre-Coding (Saldana, 2016) *Intention: Significant words and phrases representing SJE, critical pedagogy, and professional components*		
Codes	**Number of Policies Where Present**	**Frequency**
Student Learning Expectations	3	178
Social Activism	3	11
SJE*-Potential Opportunity	3	170
SJE-Learner Accommodations	1	1
SJE-Explicit Opportunity	2	12
SJE-Diversity & Culture	1	6
SJE-Diverse Learners	1	4
Professional Reflection	2	12
Professional Learning	2	47
Professional Learning Terminology	1	67
Professional Learning Promulgation(s)	1	2
Professional Learning Goals	1	21
Professional Learning Design	1	17
Professional Learning Design-Points	1	7
Professional Learning Design-Example	1	8
Professional Learning Authorities	1	20
Professional Knowledge	4	29
Professional Expectation	6	246
Professional Diversity	1	1
Professional Application(s)	7	263
Individual Professional Learning	1	8
Educational Stakeholders	3	3
Culturally Responsive Teaching	7	101
Critical Social Values	4	31
Critical Social Issues	4	8
Critical Social Awareness	3	12
Critical Reflection	3	10
Critical Dialogue	2	3
Collaborative Professional Learning	1	3
Social Justice Education (SJE)		

During round two of coding, the Fill in Tool (Gee, 2014) was utilized with a focus on context

and areas that demonstrated a need for clarity or the presence of potential assumptions over the

reader's perspective and knowledge. Each code, frequency, and presence within policy is noted in Table 4.2. Here, high-frequency codes included *Context-Kansas' Students Long Term Success*, *Context-Student Learning*, as well as *Clarity Needed-SJE Supported within This Learning* and *Knowledge Needed for Effective SJE*. Additional codes which proved present in five or more policies were *Policy Intention*, *Assumption-Taught with SJE Application*, and *Assumption-Practitioner Knowledge to Accommodate Student Demographics and Learning Needs*.

Table 4.2.

Round Two Codes and Frequencies

Coding Round 2: Fill in Tool (Gee, 2014) *Intention: Data contexts based in policy use, assumptions, and reader understanding*		
Codes	**Number of Policies Where Present**	**Frequency**
Policy Intention	7	23
Knowledge Needed for Effective SJE	6	56
Context-Student Learning	5	171
Context-Responsible Parties for Professional Learning	1	16
Context-Professional Learning Expectations	1	24
Context-Professional Learning Component	1	15
Context-Professional Expectation	2	41
Context-Policy Makers and Participants	4	9
Context-PL SIP RBSD Planning*	1	4
Context-Kansas' Students Long Term Success	4	136
Context-Individual PD** Plan	1	2
Context-District-Agency PD Plan	1	14
Context-District Responsibility	1	1
Clarity Needed-Who is Responsible to Facilitate	2	14
Clarity Needed-SJE Supported within This Learning	5	60
Clarity Needed-District or School Responsibility to Facilitate	1	10
Clarity Needed-Culturally Responsive Teaching as an Expected Component	2	25
Assumption-Taught with SJE Application	5	27
Assumption-Practitioners Know This and Actively Integrate	4	37
Assumption-Practitioners Can Facilitate Their Growth Effectively	1	6
Assumption-Practitioner Knowledge to Accommodate Student Demographics and Learning Needs	5	37
Professional Learning (PL) School Improvement Plan (SIP) Results-Based Staff Development (RBSD)		
Professional Development (PD)		

In round three of coding, the Big "D" Discourse tool (Gee, 2014) was applied to each policy, and focused on forms of discourse, including varying Discourse lens in policy consumption, formal educational language components, and observations of repetitive, generic language applied to educational concepts, which the researcher referred to as umbrella phrasing. High frequency codes in this round included *Discourse Lens-Kansans*, *Discourse Lens-SJE or CRT Lens*, and *Educational Depth Through Critical Pedagogy*. Additional frequency observations included the presence of certain codes within five or more policies, which, in addition to previously stated codes, included *SJE Language*, *Discourse Lens-Critical Practices and Professional Learning*, and *Formal Educational Language-Critical Competencies*. The findings of frequency and number of policies holding each code is found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3.

Round Three Codes and Frequencies

Coding Round 3: Big "D" Discourse Tool (Gee, 2014)		
Intention: Application to beliefs and attitudes based in language and Discourse frameworks		
Codes	**Number of Policies Where Present**	**Frequency**
Umbrella Phrasing to Cover Effective Classroom Structures	3	11
Umbrella Phrasing to Cover All Learners Including Ability and Diversity	3	32
SJE Language	6	56
Formal Educational Language-Professional Growth and Development	3	31
Formal Educational Language-Evaluation	2	17
Formal Educational Language-Critical Competencies	5	33
Educational Depth Through Critical Pedagogy	7	68
Discourse Lens-Influence Elementary VS Secondary	3	4
Discourse Lens-Quality Parameters Professional Learning	1	45
Discourse Lens-Kansans	4	139
Discourse Lens-Critical Practices and Professional Learning	5	21
Discourse Lens-Collaborative Professional Learning	1	16
Discourse Lens-SJE or CRT* Lens	7	194
Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)		

Coding Round 4 was based in the Frame Tool (Gee, 2014), which required the researcher to examine potential patterns and assumptions. This led to the researcher focusing on three separate

areas which required further examination. By looking at the areas (outlined in Table 4.4) selected

for additional examination, choice was based in determining alignment between policy and

KSDE values, as well as efforts to ensure efficiency and accuracy in researcher knowledge.

Documents focused on the inclusion and support of the Rose Capacities, or Rose Standards, were

examined due to the correlation to professional expectations supporting practitioner actions

which acknowledge levels of critical social awareness. The Frame Tool allowed for the

researcher to confirm connection to professional expectation as the standards serve as a

mandated component learning for Kansas students, which includes citizenship and cultural

components. The pattern within policies to acknowledge Kansas values and visions also required

follow-up, allowing the researcher to observe correlation within KSDE vision, mission, and

value statements. Finally, documents reviewing required staff trainings were reviewed. This

examination was focused on ensuring the analysis had not missed opportunity for expected

professional learning associated with study components.

Table 4.4.

Round Four Areas of Examination

Coding Round 4: Frame Tool (Gee, 2014)
Intention: Investigating patterns in analysis and researcher assumptions for clarity and insight

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="1">Examination:
Rose Capacities</td>
<td>Reason for Follow-Up: Additional reading was conducted on KSDE to ensure researcher waws understanding Rose Capacities (also known as Rose Standards) and applying insights effectively.

Item(s) reviewed: The Rose Capacities Primer for Kansas Boards of Education; Rose Standard Capacities-Kansas Requirements and Outcomes

Findings: The Rose Standards are not considered curriculum but are to be considered goals for what Kansas aims for students to do. They are considered similar to the Kansas College and Career Readiness Standards (KCCR), with expanded expectations concerning citizenship, as well as the arts and health. They include the following major components: communication and basic skills; civic and social engagement; physical and mental health; arts and cultural appreciation; postsecondary and career preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination:
Kansas Values and KSDE</td>
<td>Reason for Follow-Up: The research revealed a pattern of policy focused on Kansas 'values' and visions. Follow-up was conducted to see if alignment was clearly observed on KSDE's website.

Item(s) reviewed: Webpage: https://www.ksde.org/Home/Quick-Links/About-Us

Findings: A stated goal of KSDE is "to provide all Kansas children with equal access to a quality, high-level education that promotes student achievement and prepares all students for global success."
Vision Statement: Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.
Mission Statement: We are an agency of Kansans serving Kansans by inspiring, coaching, and leading to create the conditions for each student's success.
Value Statement: Commitment to our purpose. Service to others. Respect for self and others. Continual improvement through learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination:
Required Staff Training</td>
<td>Reason for Follow-Up: Follow up investigation to ensure there was not a missed opportunity within the analysis to review 'required' professional learning that may be associated with the content related to this study.

Item(s) reviewed: Required Staff Trainings; Required and Recommended Student and Staff Training-2021-2022 School Year

Findings: A review of both resources demonstrated a focus on mandated trainings related to the areas of Leadership, Prevention and Responsive Culture, as well as Student Safety and Wellness. Topics include Juvenile Justice; Negotiations; Professional Development Council training; Bullying Awareness and Prevention; Preventing Abuse and Mandated reporting; Education for the Homeless; Emergency Safety Interventions; Sexual Harassment; Suicide Awareness and Prevention; Structured Literacy and Dyslexia; and Bloodborne Pathogens.
*non-staff trainings were not included in this list</td>
</tr>
</table>

The review of additionally examined documents demonstrated varied required trainings, for students and educational staff above and beyond certified practitioners, which did not demonstrate connection with study components, such as social justice education (SJE) or culturally responsive teaching. Throughout the examination of these components, based in the Frame Tool design, confirmation of insights and support continued to develop understanding of findings.

In finalizing policy analysis, coding round five focused on the development of higher levels of meaning. Here, three categories were developed for each of the study's research questions. All codes utilized within rounds one, two, and three were reviewed and connected to the three categories, as demonstrated in Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7, which are located within the breakdown of findings within the following sections. At this point, the researcher reviewed all components (language, phrasing, and content) connected to the codes within each category, finalizing patterns and meaningful processing of the data. Coding Round 5 ultimately facilitated the development of the study's major themes.

In the following sections, findings are presented in the format of major study themes. Supporting the study's discourse analysis methodology, language from coding will be provided to support clarity of findings in connection to the research questions. Research questions included:

1. What language is used to formally address concepts of social justice education within K-2 professional policies?

    a. How are concepts of critical pedagogy situated within K-2 policies?

2. What professional expectations are established within the Kansas Department of

Education's professional policies to support the facilitation of purposeful professional

learning outcomes based in social justice educational concepts among K-2 practitioners?

A description of each finding will be provided, as well as a graphic representation to support

illustration of findings aligned with policy language and coding.

Language Used to Address Social Justice Education

Research question one is focused on identifying language used to [formally] address SJE

concepts. To effectively address the use of language within educational policy, the study

maintained a multi-dimensional approach to analysis within a critical discourse lens. Use of

coding trends allowed for deeper analysis of patterned findings and the development of major

themes, like the use of implicit language and phrasing to demonstrate SJE. These coding trends

may be observed in Figure 4.5, which includes a breakdown of the categorical coding sort which

occurred during the final round of analysis, which focused on determining the major themes and

higher levels of meaning connected to specific research question components. Table 4.5

represents specifically the coding sort for Research Question 1. Language used to formally

address concepts of SJE within K-2 professional policies included language within themes of: a)

language communicating culturally responsive teaching practices, b) coded language to indicate

support for all learners, c) language communicating an appearance of values being

acknowledged through social justice language and concepts. A description of each sub-theme is

provided within the following sections.

Table 4.5.

Round Five Categorical Coding Sort: Research Question 1

Coding Round 5: Focused Coding (Saldana, 2016)		
Intention: Higher Levels of Meaning in analysis of coding and policies		
Research Question 1	**Connecting Codes to Priority Research Concepts**	**Correlating Study Findings**
Analyzing Language Used to Address SJE	- Discourse Lens-Kansans - Umbrella Phrasing to Cover Effective Classroom Structures - Umbrella Phrasing to Cover All Learners - SJE Language - Culturally Responsive Teaching - SJE-Potential Opportunity - SJE-Learner Accommodations - SJE-Explicit Opportunity - SJE-Diversity & Culture - SJE-Diverse Learners - Clarity Needed-Culturally Responsive Teaching as an Expected Component - Assumption-Taught with SJE Application - Clarity Needed-SJE Supported within This Learning - Knowledge Needed for Effective SJE Application - Context-Kansas' Students Long Term Success - Context-Student Learning - Student Learning Expectations - Ability and Diversity - Social Activism	*Language communicating culturally responsive teaching practices* *Coded language to indicate support for all learners* *Language communicating an appearance of values through social justice language and concepts*

Language Communicating Culturally Responsive Practice

Language demonstrating culturally responsive practices are reflected through several of the codes provided in Figure 4.5, not limited to, but including SJE language, culturally responsive teaching, as well as assumptions based in teaching with SJE applications. The use of language depicting culturally responsive teaching could be found throughout each of the policies within the study, however, only one did so with the use of explicit statements and terminology. Throughout the analysis, codes used to describe effective classroom structures, as well as explicit use of SJE concepts and culturally responsive instruction demonstrated the presence and depiction of culturally responsive practice as a professional asset. The History, Government, and Social Studies (HGSS) Standards consistently refer to culturally relevant pedagogy within each grade level's review of effective classroom practice. Here, value is placed in recognition over use

of "students' cultural and experiential references in all aspects of learning" (Kansas Department of Education, 2020, p. 21). The HGSS Standards have the most focused and clear expectation of culturally responsive practice within Kansas classrooms, consistently demonstrating and connecting effective practice with practitioner cultural awareness.

Shared professional expectations amongst policies of culturally responsive teaching practices existed, however they lacked the benefit of concise language, often appearing in coded or generic phrasing as well as complex instructional descriptions. For instance, professional learning policies included Kansas Professional Education Standards (Kansas Department of Education, 2008) which require a wide range of expected professional practice. Examples found within the study included expectations for practitioners to demonstrate social awareness associated with learning, understanding for creating effective classroom environments which value individual backgrounds and identities, as well as the use of instructional practices reflective of and responsive to student groups which extends into effective assessment. Through a culturally responsive lens, the standards indicate educational practices based in valuing student backgrounds and identities as well as prioritizing an effective learning space representative of those values. National Staff Development Council (NSDC) Standards (Kansas Department of Education, 2008) included an expectation of professional development focused on equity measures. Standard Ten outlines staff development which "prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement" (Kansas Department of Education, 2008). Additionally, the associated rubric for quality evaluation of this professional development expectation includes the identification of optimal levels of practice should include acknowledgement of students' diverse backgrounds. In continuing with language associating

standardized professional practice with culturally responsive teaching, the Kansas Educator

Evaluation Protocol (KEEP) also reflected components of culturally responsive teaching, such as

positive classroom cultures, respectful learning environments, high expectations for all, which

were highlighted as effective teaching practices and professional expectations. Moving further

into effective teaching practices, the role of educators in supporting all learners was

acknowledged throughout policy language in limited, yet revealing, ways.

Coded Language Indicates Support for All Learners

An extension of culturally responsive teaching is the goal of success and high

expectations for all students, regardless of student backgrounds and identities. Concepts related

to support for all learners are represented through codes based in SJE-diverse learners, learner

accommodations, umbrella phrasing to cover all learners, as well as context based in student

learning. As each policy highlighted the support and anticipated success of all learners within

Kansas classrooms, few went beyond the coded language of 'all learners' or 'diverse learners'

when describing practitioners' need to accommodate the varying students present in any given

Kansas classroom. There were instances where the attempt was made to demonstrate

understanding of diverse learners, but the language was limited to featuring students with special

needs or English language learners (Kansas Department of Education, 2019). When connecting

professional knowledge to diverse student groups, however, the PDC Guidelines policy bolstered

value in the form of disaggregation of student data within the planning process for school

improvement planning. Yet, the researcher observed limited follow-up with examples or

explanations on incorporation of that data into professional learning design, beyond the inclusion

of opportunity to gauge student learning (Kansas Department of Education, 2008). While there

remains great variance in the diversity of classroom composites across the state of Kansas,

further development of language used to identify what may be considered a 'diverse learner' may presumably serve to better engage and develop practitioners in their pursuit of supporting students and gaining professional knowledge over effective classroom processes.

Language and the Appearance of Values Related to Social Justice Education

Building on the support for language development within policy, to better connect current classroom realities and professional practice, SJE is presented as an option rather than an expectation. Concepts and concerns connected to values are demonstrated in Figure 4.5 with codes such as context for Kansas' students long term success as well as social activism. While there is use of some explicit language, such as equity, culture, and culturally relevant teaching, those instances are largely limited. When conducting Coding Round 3, which focused on consideration of Gee's (2014) Big "D" Discourse tool, much of the generic language and areas which allude to SJE would appear, in contrast, quite differently to practitioners with varying levels of knowledge and comfort with SJE concepts. Recognizing the potential influence of Discourse, questions may be raised over what the policy intended for understanding among policy readers and what assumptions were made over varying professional Discourse lenses. For example, the English Language Arts (ELA) Standards included the foundational practice of striving to understand diverse perspectives (Kansas State Board of Education, 2017). In isolation, understanding diverse perspectives could be understood to simply involve class discussions and support opinion exploration within ELA content learning. However, understanding diverse perspectives could also be received as a direct call to support dialogue over critical social issues and understanding for cultural beliefs and experiences. Similarly, the KEEP policy highlights the professional expectation of maintaining high expectations and rigor for all students (Kansas Department of Education, 2014) but stops short of establishing a connection to culturally

responsive teaching. In doing so, some practitioners (and evaluators) may limit professional

approaches to making accommodations based only on documented learning needs, such as

students with Individualized Learning Plans (IEP), while a practitioner with knowledge over

social justice concepts connected to education will recognize the need to expand understanding

to include cultural, gender, ability, race, socioeconomic student backgrounds.

This pattern also extended into actual content learning, especially within HGSS and ELA

Standards. While HGSS Standards included more explicit language connecting culture to

learning, there were many instances where depth of instructional application of cultural concepts

and social justice educational components would greatly vary based on practitioner Discourse

frames. For instance, HGSS Standards, the Kansans Can Fact Sheet, as well as the form

demonstrating practices to 'Improve Civic Engagement in Any Classroom' all highlight civic

engagement as a vital learning component supporting students' development into informed

citizens. However, without specific language demonstrating application which acknowledges

social justice issues and critical social competencies, civic engagement could easily be attributed

to generic volunteer work. In contrast, a practitioner holding a Discourse lens based in SJE and

culturally responsive teaching would observe opportunity for not only cultural competencies and

content development, but also critical pedagogical processes within classroom instruction,

including the facilitation of critical dialogue, critical reflection, and the development of critical

consciousness among students, which will be more deeply discussed in the following section.

Exploring the Presence and Application of Critical Pedagogical Concepts

In order to address Research Question 1a, this study included coding processes to

specifically examine how concepts of critical pedagogy are situated within K-2 policies.

Findings demonstrated both expected and surprising results, when applying critical pedagogy to

students verses practitioners. Opportunities for Kansas students are thoroughly demonstrated and stated. However, there existed the limitation of inferred skills based in critical pedagogical components within professional learning structures, without the benefit of specific language requiring its use. Ultimately, findings over the concepts of critical pedagogy situated within policy included the themes of a) critical pedagogy aligned with Kansas values, and b) critical pedagogy implied within professional knowledge and practice. These findings are demonstrated (Table 4.6) and described in the following sections.

Table 4.6.

Round Five Categorical Coding Sort: Research Question 1a

Coding Round 5: Focused Coding (Saldana, 2016) *Intention: Higher Levels of Meaning*		
Research Question 1a	**Connecting Codes to Priority Research Concepts**	**Correlating Study Findings**
Exploring the Presence and Application of Critical Pedagogical Concepts	• Formal Educational Language-Critical Competencies • Educational Depth Through Critical Pedagogy • Culturally Responsive Teaching • Professional Reflection • Critical Social Values • Critical Social Issues • Critical Social Awareness • Critical Reflection • Critical Dialogue	*Critical pedagogy aligned with Kansas values* *Critical pedagogy implied within professional knowledge and practice*

Critical Pedagogy and Kansas Values

Throughout the study's policy examination, the language suggested consistent commitment to Kansans' values which were often aligned to concepts of SJE through a connection to critical pedagogical concepts. Values included the vision for success as engaged, knowledgeable and positively contributing citizens, involving local, national, and global levels. The associations to critical pedagogy within policy is demonstrated through the presence of language connected to the codes pictured within Figure 4.6 and were reflected within values

specifically according to codes over formal educational language based in critical competencies, as well as the occurrence of educational depth through critical pedagogy, and critical social values and issues. Critical pedagogical concepts such as cultural competencies, active civic engagement as well as civic dispositions, and the ability to problem solve and consider diverse perspectives were present throughout the examined policies. Through these findings, the researcher utilized Gee's (2014) Frame Tool to confirm if these values found within varying policies were aligned with KSDE's stated values. While exact language was not mirrored within the Frame Tool examination, the concepts reflective of knowledge gained through critical pedagogy remained. KSDE's Value Statement is stated below (https://www.ksde.org/Home/Quick-Links/About-Us):

Value Statement: Commitment to our purpose. Service to others. Respect for self and others. Continual improvement through learning.

Additionally, the policies based in civic engagement take these critical social concepts even further through use of reflection aimed at acknowledging others' viewpoints, using dialogue to develop awareness, as well as establishing the practice of challenging personal bias and understanding of real-world issues. Application of a critical pedagogical lens to the outlined values for Kansas kids could provide support in practitioners' ability to meet the vision for success and optimal student engagement. Use of the concepts critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness will enhance the depth of student knowledge and academic experience. These concepts are purposely centered within a student mindset and long-term learning framework, demonstrating opportunity for depth and meaningful development, consistently framed through policy highlights over Kansas values.

Critical Pedagogy Implied in Professional Knowledge and Practice

In contrast to the purposeful inclusion of critical pedagogical concepts within student learning frameworks, the presence of these concepts within professional frameworks were largely limited to implied professional knowledge and practice. With codes such as culturally responsive teaching, critical dialogue, as well as both professional and critical reflection, there was clear policy language indicative of professional expectations correlating to critical pedagogical concepts. One example is found within Standard Thirteen of the Kansas Professional Education Standards (Kansas Department of Education, 2008, p. 7) states "The educator is a reflective practitioner who uses an understanding of historical, philosophical, and social foundations of education to guide educational practice." Additional standards demonstrate an expectation of continued professional growth, the ability to make learning meaningful, awareness of social development, support of diverse learners, and quality instructional practices focused on student achievement. However, Standard Thirteen appears the most direct pathway towards an application of critical pedagogy, with its inclusion of reflection applied to historical and social foundations. With that in mind, professional frameworks include implied use of critical reflection, dialogue, and consciousness through a breakdown of professional learning guidelines and educator evaluation protocols. For example, PDC guidelines (2008), require collaborative learning supporting dialogue and reflection as forms of examination over practitioner viewpoints and potential areas for personal development, such as examination of bias and the development of greater social awareness in support of student learning. Additionally, the KEEP Protocol outlines professional expectations based in reflection towards the goal of continuous growth, including the practice of applying student data and engaging in meaningful issues within a real-world setting (Kansas Department of Education, 2014). The

ability for practitioners to assume initiative in aligning these professional expectations and learning guidelines to critical social competencies is questionable based on the Discourse lens and associated knowledge and perspective base of each individual practitioner. The limitations based in varying Discourse impacts the effective inclusion of critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness among practitioners towards meaningful professional applications.

Perhaps the most considerable finding is the juxtaposition of student learning incorporating critical pedagogical concepts, with the marked absence in explicit professional opportunities of the same depth. Consideration for the civic engagement, citizenship development, and cultural competencies, all of which are present within the reviewed policies, facilitate questions over practitioners' ability to effectively facilitate without the benefit of the meaningful development first accomplished through critical pedagogy. For instance, the creation of cognitive dissonance is encouraged as an effective tool for teaching civic engagement, specifically through the modality of teacher modeling (Kansas Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally, English Language Arts Standards emphasize the value of students understanding diverse perspectives (ELA, 2017), while the Math Standards (2019) include the Rose Capacities which feature a standard of learning for students to gain appreciation of their cultural heritage alongside Kansas Social, Emotional, Character development (SECD) Standards with a goal of continual cognitive, emotional, and social development. Each of these examples are supported through student-learning based in critical levels of reflection, dialogue, and value for critical consciousness. Coding which indicated critical pedagogical concepts were reflected throughout each of the policies reviewed for the study, reflecting critical pedagogy connected to learning related to SJE and students' learning experiences. The findings over student learning based in critical pedagogy is cause for questioning how practitioners may effectively reproduce the depth

of learning associated with critical pedagogy without previous professional exposure and experience with it.

Identifying Opportunities for Professional Learning Related to SJE and Professional Expectations

When considering professional expectations as pertinent zones of practitioner knowledge and applied practice(s), then the question may be asked on how those areas are reflected within professional learning opportunities. Research question two was based in identifying the professional expectations that are established within KSDE's professional policies which would support the facilitation of professional learning with outcomes based in social justice educational concepts. The study's findings demonstrated a) an inferred assumption of SJE practices through the form of culturally responsive instruction, and b) a focused facilitation of civic-based behaviors such as engagement, democratic processes, and empathy (Kansas State Department of Education, 2020; Kansas State Department of Education, n.d.). While Table 4.7 demonstrates the connection of coding to the findings aligned to Research Question 2, the following sections will describe both areas of associated correlating study findings in further detail.

Table 4.7.

Round Five Categorical Coding Sort: Research Question 2

Coding Round 5: Focused Coding (Saldana, 2016) *Intention: Higher Levels of Meaning*		
Research Question 2	**Connecting Codes to Priority Research Concepts**	**Correlating Study Findings**
Identifying Opportunities for Professional Expectations Related to SJE and Professional Learning	- Context-Individual PD Plan - Context-District-Agency PD Plan - Context-District Responsibility - Context-Responsible Parties for Professional Learning - Context-Professional Learning Experiences - Context-Professional Learning Component - Context-Professional Expectation - Clarity Needed-District or School Responsibility to Facilitate - Knowledge Needed for Effective SJE Application - Clarity Needed-Who is Responsible to Facilitate - Assumption-Practitioners Know This and Actively Integrate - Assumption-Practitioner Knowledge to Accommodate Student Demographics and Learning Needs - Assumption-Practitioner can Facilitate Their Growth Effectively - Discourse Lens Influence-SJE or CRT Lens - Discourse Lens-Critical Practices and Professional Learning - Discourse Lens-Collaborative Professional Learning - Discourse Lens-Quality Parameters Professional Learning - Formal Educational Language-Professional Growth and Development - Formal Educational Language-Evaluation - Culturally Responsive Teaching - Professional Application - Individual Professional Learning - Professional Learning Design - Professional Learning Authorities - Professional Learning - Professional Knowledge - Professional Expectation - Professional Diversity - Professional Learning Terminology - Professional Learning Promulgation(s) - Professional Learning Goals	*Inferred SJE practices, such as culturally responsive instruction* *Civic behaviors (including engagement, democratic processes, and empathy)*

Inferred SJE Practices

Staff development and professional learning, as demonstrated within PDC Guidelines

policy and the KEEP policy, maintain a focused approach to professional learning based in

student assessment data and direct correlation to curriculum standards. As demonstrated within

Figure 4.7, codes aligned to professional learning, Discourse lens, and policy context all work to

contribute to greater understanding for findings which demonstrate an inferred use and

awareness of SJE practices, including culturally responsive instruction, without the benefit of

clear and concise language. With a results-based staff development design, Kansas practitioners, while allowing for personalized development according to school needs, may limit the opportunity for explicit professional learning based in supporting the instructional goals outlined above, with greater value based in assessment scores. However, the rigid design does allow for schools to personalize the strategies according to specific school and staff needs. For instance, if schools are able to seriously address the disaggregation of data as outlined in the PDC Guidelines, they may be able to meaningfully support student achievement gaps. Recognizing achievement gaps as an active concern connecting SJE and today's classrooms (Shields, 2004), the strategic selection of staff development components to ensure practitioners understand effective supports for students with diverse backgrounds offers a direct and meaningful approach to professional learning within an SJE framework. The NSDC Standards include an expectation for staff development meeting all students' needs, with a standard dedicated specifically to equity. The Kansas Staff Development Rubric for District/School Assessment (Kansas Department of Education, 2008) outlines the highest level of effective staff development associated with equity includes the implementation of school-wide practices promoting respect for students' backgrounds, families, and the establishment of safe school environments, as well as a focus on closing achievement gaps and the consistency of high expectations for all learners. These directly connect to SJE components and culturally responsive teaching. However, the decision to conduct transparency in staff learning with a SJE framework resides within options of district and school planning processes rather than identified clearly as a KSDE expectation. Additionally, the mandated Rose Capacities, which serve as prioritized goals for students to be able to demonstrate, are to be supported through "careful teacher planning and implementation in the classroom" (Kansas State Department of Education, 2019, p. 6) to enhance student learning.

The Rose Capacities, also known as the Rose Standards, include components focused on long term success for Kansas students, which involve communication and basic skills, civic and social engagement, physical and mental health, arts and cultural appreciation, postsecondary and career preparation (Kansas Association of School Boards, 2014). After thorough review and analysis of the study's selected policies, there is not a clear connection between these instructional expectations and staff development realities. The separation of instructional expectations and staff development builds towards the secondary finding, which focused on professional expectations and professional learning needs based in supporting civic behaviors as demonstrated within policy.

Supporting Civic Behaviors

The policies reviewed for this study each, in some capacity, stated value for civic engagement, whether that was demonstrated as an academic strength or as a source of long-term student success. Codes for this area of findings focused largely on assumptions, such as concepts which practitioners know and actively integrate, as well as an assumption of practitioner knowledge to accommodate student demographics and learning needs. There is also a reality that professional applications, contexts, and Discourse lens may influence the ability of practitioners to successfully integrate civic behaviors into their instructional practices, leading to the finding that there exists opportunity for support of this professional expectation through professional learning processes. One example of professional expectation based in policy in accordance with civic behaviors includes HGSS (Kansas State Department of Education, 2020) mission statement, which is focused on preparing students to be: an informed citizen; a thoughtful citizen; an engaged citizen. The policy includes recognition of bias and personal values, respect for others, democratic action, civil discourse, and more as active traits towards this mission of

what may be considered effective civic behavior. HGSS continues their support of these goals by consistently supporting the use of culturally relevant teaching practices, which are recognized in this study as culturally responsive instruction. There is not, however, a clear professional learning protocol or expectation which indicates practitioners require training to support these instructional practices and effective integration of civic behavior into learning structures. Recognizing assumptions over a standard of civic behavior among all practitioners, or even a standard of *understanding* for ideal civic behavior, could allow for greater clarity in developing professional learning protocol which assists in providing clarity as well as direction for appropriate professional actions in supporting policy goals and learners towards civic behavior and the associated characteristics.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of this study's critical policy discourse analysis based in the examination of K-2 policy with consideration of social justice language. The inclusion and examination of coding rounds through visual representations provided additional insight into the research findings as well as demonstrated the role and implications of language within the selected policy. With the intention of exploring professional learning capacitates in connection to SJE frameworks, the research findings revealed opportunities for professional learning in connection to SJE, the existence of critical pedagogical concepts alongside opportunity for development, as well as the presence of language which supports SJE within Kansas' educational framework. The following chapter will discuss overall study conclusions and implications, as well as limitations and considerations for future research.

Chapter Five

This study investigated educational policy from the Kansas State Department of Education and examined social justice language, critical pedagogical concepts, and professional learning expectations. The preceding chapter provided study findings from the policy analysis, including findings based in answering each research question. The research questions focused on analyzing language used to address SJE, exploring the presence and application of critical pedagogical concepts, as well as identifying opportunities for professional expectations related to SJE and professional learning. Building on the study's findings, this chapter will provide a review of the study, as well as research implications, recommendations for future research, and a review of study limitations.

Study Summary

This study recognized the need for practitioners to hold wide-ranging knowledge over pedagogical processes to provide equitable learning in the modern-day school and classroom (Floden et al., 2020). Additionally, educational leaders' reliance on professionals to instinctively engage in social justice practices is not practical (Baily et al., 2014). The examination of policy and the present discourse allows for increased awareness for those the policy could impact (Edmondson, 2004) as well as to better understand opportunities within further policy development. The purpose of conducting this study was to examine and understand professional expectations and opportunity for SJE within K-2 classrooms, and the reality of professional learning opportunities connected to demonstrating those concepts.

Connecting Research Purpose, Questions, and Findings

Aimed at supporting the development of modern-day practitioners towards equitable learning and increased care and awareness for social justice concepts, this study examined KSDE

policies in analysis over language utilized to establish professional capacities through expected

practice as well as professional development, which directly support social justice concepts

within a K-2 framework. As reviewed in Figure 5.1, research questions were designed to

purposefully review policy language used to address concepts of social justice, an examination of

critical pedagogical concepts within the selected policies, as well as an analysis over professional

expectations in association with professional learning and SJE concepts. Each research question

was focused fully within the scope of K-2, although several policies do not make a grade-span

specification and are applicable for use among all K-12 practitioners.

Figure 5.1.

Research Questions

Question 1:   *What language is used to formally address concepts of social justice education within K-2 professional policies?*

Question 1-A: *How are concepts of critical pedagogy situated within K-2 policies?*

Question 2:   *What professional expectations are established within the Kansas Department of Education's professional policies to support the facilitation of purposeful professional learning outcomes based in social justice educational concepts among K-2 practitioners?*

Each research question's purpose and design were carefully aligned to coding processes and

analysis tools throughout the course of the study, to ensure alignment to findings. Question 1 was

focused on recognizing the language currently used to demonstrate social justice content. This

was applied to formal areas of expectation, as well as terminology, content range, context, and

areas where the researcher perceived gaps in clarity or presence. Question 1a, based in critical

pedagogy and its correlated impact on effective learning, was aimed in better understanding effective policy and training for practitioners. This was connected to research through examination over discourse demonstrating culturally responsive teaching as well as critical social concepts. Finally, Question 2 explored opportunities for professional learning supportive of social justice concepts, which within the study incorporated the idea of connection between professional expectation and related professional learning opportunities.

With a critical research framework, which is naturally supportive of social justice (Crotty, 1998), discourse analysis allowed for opportunity of making sense over ways meaning is made within educational contexts (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosely, Hui & O'Garro Joseph, 2005). In using the policy analysis structure to consider the works of school and society (Prunty, 1985), this study sought to reveal, understand, and work towards transformation (Rogers et al., 2005) of language within policy. Due to the researcher's role within education, in addition to educational training in SJE, an understanding for language and policy context through participation within public schooling institutions (Rogers et al., 2005) was utilized to support insight and understanding. Following what Edmondson (2004) marked as the intent of critical policy study, the examination of policy effectiveness, what it is based in the embedded values as well as social consequences, the researcher shared findings which revealed a range of impact and application to current practitioner realities focused in several areas. These findings included use of language supportive of SJE ideas and the existence of critical pedagogical concepts. Additional findings included gaps in opportunities for professional learning connected with SJE, with potential for future development. Valuable opportunities for students based in SJE concepts will also be discussed, focused on use of critical social concepts and culturally responsive instruction within the classroom. In order to optimize the potential in study outcomes,

implications of the findings may be explored with the anticipation of what new opportunities

may be found in gained insights in partnership with educational contexts.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

There are three areas of implication for practice inferred from the study's findings. These

implications extend not only to policy makers, but also to those utilizing educational policy,

including educational leaders and classroom practitioners. As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, the

study implications are focused on acknowledging areas of policy, SJE, and professional learning.

By exploring implications of the findings, conclusions over practice and policy impact may

support the development of values towards educational progress and potential impact.

Figure 5.2.

Implications of Study Findings
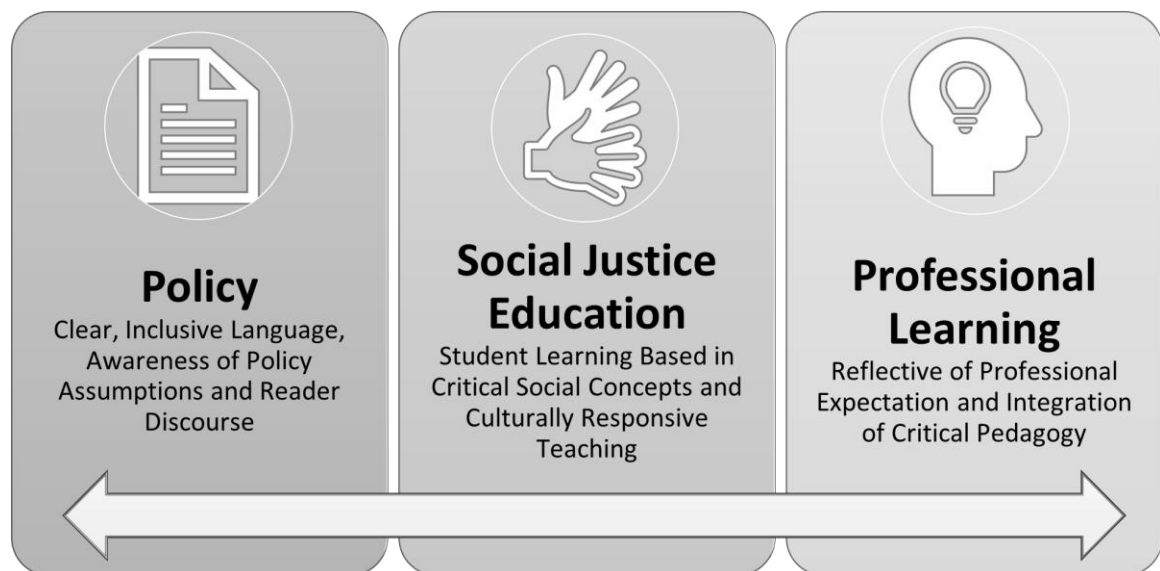
Edmondson (2004) established the use of policy examination to expose contradictions and

inadequacies for the sake of informing progress. While policy scholars aim to utilize discourse to

determine capacities for critique and change (Arce-Trigatti & Anderson, 2018), there is also a

need to demonstrate consideration for logical and realistic transitions towards change. As previously noted in Chapter 2, Cohen and Lowenberg Ball's (1990) research demonstrated instructional policy and instructional practices affect one another. Related to this study's findings, the implications within progressing policy may be challenging in determining the scope needed for impact. In order to intervene within the development of policy norms and processes (Schwarz, 2019), there may be need to bring practitioners into the policy making process. However, in contrast to Cohen and Lowenberg Ball's (1990) study, this current study implicates areas for action which exemplify power in progressing policy itself, beginning with concepts of language and greater awareness for those utilizing the policy.

While research has demonstrated that teachers are a key area of resistance to progress regarding social justice orientations to learning (Theoharis, 2007), there may be a need for clarity in how to best serve students' needs and learning in this regard, while equipping teachers to effectively conduct rather than obstruct progress with SJE in schools. Equipping teachers for SJE is supported through the additional discussion of supporting professional learning opportunities which both mirror professional expectation as well as integrate critical pedagogy. Discussion over implications for practice provides actions based in policy, SJE, and professional learning, in order to offer potential action for educational progress.

Policy

The power of policy should not be understated. As Prunty (1985) suggests, educational policy is manifested within classrooms through structure, procedure, and practitioners' expectations. Recognizing policy's role in communicating ideals (Edmondson, 2004), there are clear implications for KSDE policy to consider. If the theory of affordance aids in determining the possibilities of action (Evans et al., 2017) in a policy's ability to enable or constrain

(Hallström & Jacob, 2017), then policy holds tangible power. Additionally, in recognizing the discursive properties of policy, values and ideologies related to larger social contexts (Sam, 2019) can be demonstrated. The language and Discourse within policy do not maintain objective communication, "they continuously build and rebuild institutions" (Sam, 2019, p. 347). In pursuing higher levels of effectiveness and meaning within policy, as well as development of policy for greater impact and integrative properties aligned to SJE, there must be a careful review over the power of policy language. Considering affordance of policy refers to the possibilities of how a policy may be used or constrain the user (Hallström & Jacob, 2017), real change may begin with identifying opportunity for transitioning generic language within policy to more explicit, inclusive terms and phrasing. Consideration for assumptions presented by policy, as well as purposeful awareness for the differentiating Discourse lens' applied to policy by readers may lead to further enhancement and development of educational policy.

Policy and Generic Language

The study revealed use of generic language suggesting a need for further consideration for how language is perceived and may be effectively developed. For example, policies consistently utilized terms such as 'diverse learners' or 'all learners' to denote wide ranging student needs, backgrounds, cultures, abilities, and more. Not only did the phrasing appear generic in form, but it also could communicate a coded meaning. The National Education Association (2017) defines coded language as the substitution of "terms describing racial identity with seemingly race-neutral terms that disguise explicit and/or implicit racial animus" (p. 25). The restrictive phrasing seen within the generic language and terminology of reviewed KSDE policies not only holds the potential to mislead practitioners from effective educational practices for wide-ranging student needs and classroom processes, but the coding can also serve to reduce

power and impact (Farnsworth & Solomon, 2013) of more expressive, explicit language, permitting bias and potential deficit thinking. Additionally, formalizing language, such as gender, race, culture, religion, and more could allow for practitioners and policy makers to review these policy components free of the baggage (Farnsworth & Solomon, 2013) found in the more informal, socialized use of the phrases which may be more readily associated with [personal] politics. If it is vital for practitioners to hold autonomy in acknowledging realities connected to their classrooms (Riordan, Klein, & Gaynor, 2019), especially considering social issues and student identities, there must be an effort to create inclusive language which validates the experiences of not only practitioners, but also the existence of Kansas students. Essentially, inclusive language could make way for Kansas students to move beyond idealized receptacles for knowledge into actualized individuals with potentials and futures as valuable citizens.

Awareness for Policy and Discourse

Study findings demonstrated a large gap in language between the professional understanding for and awareness of SJE opportunities within policies. The reality of SJE as an option rather than an expectation becomes a conflict which unfortunately falls on practitioners to process and resolve. When reviewing policy language and contents through a Discourse lens, there was a consistent need to examine researcher understanding for policy intent in relation to assumptions which could be made according to varying professional Discourse lenses. Differing professional knowledge levels as well as personal backgrounds mark a risk within policy language, where some practitioners may limit action according to policy, where others would expand action. Policies cannot afford the luxury of presumptions over audience understanding and applications. "Policies are built on discourse, from their conception to their implementation" (Sam, 2019, p. 347). Therefore, when policy is consumed according to conflicting Discourse,

there is powerful potential in policy to be perceived polarizing (Sam, 2019), as well as the potential for pointed policy narratives to emerge. While the current study findings indicated plausible need for understanding differentials based in Discourse, which could easily extend into a reality of policy narratives which are consequential in the determination of how policy is understood (Sam, 2019), as well as if it becomes empowered or discredited. To demonstrate this conflict of Discourse within policy, a study over teacher policy reforms in Florida (Harrison, 2017) observed the use of policy narratives which demonstrated the varied response to policy among business advocacy groups in comparison to teacher advocacy groups. The research found policy language was manipulated to demonstrate narratives supporting distinct agendas and frameworks. While practitioners should value opportunity to engage in the improvement and development of policies (Edmondson, 2004), participation should not be done through a singular lens, avoiding oppressive action (Freire, 2000). Instead, care may be taken among policy makers to ensure awareness for varying levels of understanding and meaning-making that may be applied and seek to clarify language to eliminate assumptions over policy interpretation.

Social Justice Education

If the educational system were to consider diversity as a "valuable commodity when it comes to addressing the complexities of educational problems" (Farnsworth & Solomon, 2013, p. 103), SJE would likely be found standard not only within policies, but also schools and professional structures. While that is not currently yet the case, the study findings demonstrated several meaningful opportunities connected to SJE and Kansas classrooms. Connecting the dots between policy language, as well as recognition for SJE concepts, practitioners may begin to view SJE more effectively as a professional asset rather than an optional, personal add-on within the learning experience.

Developing Students Through SJE

If careful consideration is paid to both the presence and the opportunity for SJE, concepts connected to SJE may be viewed as embedded throughout educational policy. However, as demonstrated in the study findings, critical social concepts are applied through implications of meaningful student development as well as a foundation of localized values. For example, Kansas values are highlighted throughout KSDE policies with alignment to civic engagement, empathy and awareness for others' perspectives, as well as engagement in democratic processes. If one was to expand these values into policy frameworks, the use of reflection, dialogue, and increased awareness for real-world issues are each integrated into expected student learning structures, mirroring critical pedagogical constructs. Keeping in mind that ways of thinking are supported and developed with purposeful efforts (Stembridge, 2020), practitioners cannot afford to maintain passive positions (Kohli, et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2014). It is through the practice of effective teaching and learning that students are capable of fostering political awareness (Riordan et al., 2019). Though the study originally sought to understand critical pedagogy as means for establishing effective professional learning based in SJE, findings support the expanded viewpoint of applying critical pedagogy to connect teaching and learning with students' ability to question culture (Riordan et al., 2019). Critical dialogue within a classroom setting, supported with active teacher facilitation and engagement, also supports students' search for their own voice and ability to act (Riordan et al., 2019).

Prioritizing Culturally Responsive Teaching

The development of long-term critical social concepts is only one of the benefits of SJE. Expanding the reach of SJE through culturally responsive teaching is considered as positive for all learners (Bassey, 2016), focusing on student-centered teaching (Samuels, 2018). However,

the expansion of SJE through culturally responsive teaching requires transitioning the idea of

SJE as isolated ideas within education. In doing so, culturally responsive teaching may

operationalize SJE concepts in the form of effective instructional processes, promoting

engagement and achievement among students (Khalil & Brown, 2015; Samuels, 2018), as well

as serving as a pedagogy (Hsiao, 2015) which recognizes the cultural backgrounds and

experiences of students within the educational process (Samuels, 2018). Culturally responsive

practitioners would serve to compliment the citizenship values touted throughout KSDE policy,

as this form of teaching and learning encourages student acumen based in political awareness

(Riordan et al., 2019), with the ability to demonstrate cultural competence as well as

sociopolitical consciousness (Warren, 2013). Even through a lack of concise language, there was

a consistent referral to effective instruction which mirrored culturally responsive teaching

practices. Observed in varying degrees throughout KSDE policy, culturally responsive teaching

was demonstrated in multiple ways. This included the expression of value for culturally relevant

instruction found within HGSS Standards as well as the Kansas Professional Education

Standards professional expectations of valuing students' diverse backgrounds and the creation of

effective learning structures with high expectations for all learners. Lastly, within the National

Staff development Council Standards, which focused on equity measures within professional

learning. If culturally responsive teaching is considered as high-quality instruction optimizing the

opportunity of addressing knowledge, learning, and teaching (Riordan et al., 2019), there are

clear benefits to not only utilizing this form of pedagogy, but doing so in concise and clear ways,

without reliance on practitioners to decipher effect modalities towards use, progressing

professional understanding in effectively leveraging students' (Riordan et al., 2019) identities

within meaningful educational opportunities. Advancing the goal of culturally responsive work

in schools will, however, require additional investment and priority in professional learning that offers meaningful and consistent structures (Riordan et al., 2019) in order to support practitioners' classroom applications.

Professional Learning

Professional learning offers a key strategy in supporting not only SJE, but practitioner knowledge and instructional processes. To effectively support professional practice through professional learning, efforts must be taken to develop opportunities which ensure practitioners present ownership in meaningful learning based in issues of equity and critical pedagogy (Riordan et al., 2019). Avoiding disconnects between professional learning and classroom realities (Dahlberg & Philippot, 2008), the inclusion of context and school community should be reflected throughout professional development opportunities supportive of SJE and educational equity. Current professional learning experiences serve as inadequate supports and are typically not successful in supporting the development of skills and mindsets required to effectively close student achievement gaps (Riordan et al., 2019). Today's practitioners would benefit from professional learning which reflect modern teaching expectations, as well as incorporated critical pedagogical constructs through engaging and meaningful development.

Professional Learning Reflecting Ongoing Professional Expectations

Kansas State Department of Education policy, such as the Kansas Educator Evaluation Protocol (KEEP) and Kansas Professional Development (PDC) Guidelines, include professional expectations highlighting continuous growth. Professional expectations included areas such as effective disaggregation and use of student data, engaging in meaningful issues which apply a real-world setting, as well as effective equity practices. As discussed within chapter four, practitioners' ability to assume initiative within their own development to align expectations with

instructional practices reflective of these critical social competencies is questionable. Policy would benefit from stronger correlation and alignment of professional learning which mirrors professional expectations. Unfortunately, typical professional learning often lacks targeted training on issues of equity, power, or racism (Riordan et al., 2019). Recognizing educational equity as a global concern, professional learning frameworks intended to support practitioners must address equity (Sullivan, 2021). As KSDE policy findings demonstrate value for critical social concepts and competencies among student learning and instructional practice, alignment within professional learning policy should be viewed as not only common-sense in departmental and state-wide value alignment, but also as cognizant of a framework based in educational advancement.

Critical Pedagogy Within Professional Learning Structures

Indeed, if educational equity through the lens of SJE is to occur, professional learning is further supported through the insert of critical pedagogical learning structures. Without meaningful, critical professional learning, significant gaps in practitioner applications within classrooms exist (Riordan et al., 2019). Building depth and meaning into the already existing professional learning structures, including an expectation of reflection and collaborative learning, use of critical reflection, critical dialogue, and critical consciousness add new dynamics to practitioners' understanding. Sullivan (2021) determines that "reflection of one's own role, and in particular how one's position in society affects one's epistemological beliefs and one's view of the role of education in society" (p. 22). Building on that understanding, Riordan et al. (2019) state that "when professional development asks teachers to explore compelling questions of race, class, gender, civil rights, environmental justice, or other relevant equity issues, teachers enter into learning that requires a heavy cognitive and emotional life, promotes productive struggle,

and offers the opportunity to grapple with complex concepts-all reflective of deeper learning" (p. 335). Considering the promotion of deeper learning, it is important to recall that one of the KSDE policies reviewed for this study encouraged use of cognitive dissonance as an effective instructional tool, especially when demonstrated through teacher modeling (Kansas Department of Education, n.d.). Without professional learning structures utilizing the same modality, both effective as well as depth of this instructional process is limited, with the added possibility of being mis-used or ignored fully due to a lack of practitioner understanding. Critical pedagogy recognizes knowledge as both evolving and collective (Smith & Seal, 2021). In a study focused on reviewing professional learning designs within schools which were focused on equity and deeper learning for practitioners, Riordan et al. (2019) found "there was more coherence between professional learning experiences and classroom experiences if teachers had opportunities to practice new pedagogical skills within the professional development experience" (p. 335). As demonstrated within the study, practitioners are not typically exposed to a standard of professional learning reflective of critical pedagogical concepts, likely impacting the ability of practitioners to provide or extend that level of instructional depth. By integrating critical pedagogy into professional learning processes practitioners may develop their critical thinking skills as they apply to connecting personal realities within a wider social framework (Smith & Seal, 2021).

Significance of Study

With ongoing educational conflict over the role of social justice within the K-12 structure, this study holds significance in the potential opportunity to develop educational professional learning frameworks for SJE related practitioner development. While K-12 education has never existed without some level of controversy and diverse viewpoints within

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political agencies, the current state of Kansas' K-12 education has become opportunity for political conflict which has produced polarizing perspectives over SJE in schools. By politicizing SJE concepts rather than focusing on the advancement of student achievement and innovative professional learning, power of learning transitions to power of politics. At the time of this study, House Bill No. 2662 (Committee on K-12 Education Budget, 2022), considered a parents' bill of rights, is based in transparency measures on schools. It not only includes the right of parents to review and inspect all materials correlated to instruction, but also stipulates parent rights correlated to limiting professional learning and educator actions. While this may be observed as reasonable within isolated, objective review, the capacity for subjective and limited educational awareness in correlation to political agendas lead to a dangerous implication of educational processes potentially hijacked by extreme personal and political ideologies. While the bill routinely refers to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which served as landmark civil rights legislation (National Park Service, 2016) outlawing discrimination on multiple fronts, it does so with the tone of striving to exclude race-based concepts within education. Unfortunately, legislation such as House Bill No. 2662 underscores the reality of miseducation and understanding for SJE concepts which are in fact critical to effective K-12 education, such as culturally responsive teaching and the effective training of practitioners to meet the needs of all students, which is in fact a consistent KSDE policy component.

Moving beyond the political significance of the study, this research is significant in identifying the need for greater awareness and care on the part of policy makers to address language effectively, including potential avoidance of SJE terminology. There is opportunity for policy makers to consider use of SJE vocabulary to be utilized in ways that are both technical and operational for practitioners. Utilizing SJE language and terminology in this way would not

indicate a lack of emotional connection with SJE concepts, but rather the extension of SJE into normalized and effective educational modalities which empower students, practitioners, and school communities to be reflective of the world at large. Not only does this provide an optimistic view of meaningful educational impact on individual and collective levels, but it appears to reflect the goals of KSDE, whose webpage includes the statement "It is the goal of the agency to provide all Kansas children with equal access to a quality, high-level education that promotes student achievement and prepares all students for global success" (www.ksde.org/Home/Quick-Links/About-Us, 2022). Striving to meet KSDE's stated goal, would, according to this study, include the presence of SJE language and concepts as we as correlated professional learning for practitioners to meet expectations of effective teaching.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study serves as a limited and initial analysis of educational policy and SJE in connection to professional learning realities. First, the researcher acknowledges policy context extends beyond content, and there is importance in recognizing correlating events alongside policy creation (Gee, 2014; Prunty, 1985). The policies used within this study range in creation or adoption from 2008 to as recent as 2020. Some policies have no date. An analysis of the historical events happening at the time of policy creation or modification is a critical exploration; however, an in-depth analysis of those corresponding events was outside the scope of this study. In addition, to maintain a clear focus within the scope of the research, as well as a realistic expectation of policy review, there were limitations within the specific policies which were analyzed. The large capacity of policy available to review through KSDE is on such a scale that this study acknowledges a small, purposeful review was used, which excluded other equally valued educational policy. An additional limitation of this study was in the use of general SJE

concepts within both the scope and the analysis. As an initial review of language and SJE concepts, special consideration for specific areas of SJE, such as culture, race, gender, religion, LGBTQ+, or socioeconomic status would require additional study and adjustment to methodologies. Each integral SJE components deserves additional analysis.

Moving forward, there are key opportunities to expand future research. First and foremost, case study research could include interviews with both policy makers and practitioners and would hold potential for revealing insights in policy design and purpose, as well as policy understanding and consumption. Opportunity to discern alignment or conflict between the two key stakeholders could provide direction for improved development and use of educational policy supporting effective instructional practice. A secondary implication for future research would be to expand the policy analysis to review and examine school district policies for SJE language as well as correlated professional learning. Consideration for regional districts and localized contexts could provide additional insights into policy design and practitioner decision-making.

Conclusion

Schools are a key social junction for culture, backgrounds, and socioeconomic classes (Khalil & Brown, 2015) as well as SJE, professional realities, and professional learning considerations. This study analyzed specific Kansas Department of Education's K-2 policies through a critical pedagogical lens to identify and examine the formal communication and demonstration of professional expectations situated in SJE and professional learning. Critical policy analysis was performed through the execution of multiple coding rounds. Each individual coding round was carefully designed and implemented to address the study's research questions, and coding breakdowns were established to support increased understanding for findings. The

study's findings indicate a larger discussion over policy, SJE, and professional learning. Findings indicate generic language and assumptions over reader knowledge and Discourse, SJE presented through student learning focused on critical social concepts and a presence of culturally responsive teaching constructs, as well as professional learning needs correlated to critical pedagogy and professional expectation alignment. Today's educational workforce, and those supporting the development of practitioners' professional practice, work to support the learning and growth of students. Kansas practitioners invest in local communities through the work done with Kansas kids each day. Revisiting the reality which opened this study, an understanding of today's K-12 system serving as a reflection of society through inclusion of broad cultural identities as well as social power structures (Khalil & Brown, 2015), there is now a moment of opportunity for response and action. Engaging in the development of policy and professional learning for SJE in schools is, as demonstrated within this study, not only an investment in practitioners, but in students as well.

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Appendix A - Code Descriptions

Round One Codes

Student Learning Expectations: Used to code language which expressed student learning outcomes and goals indicative of student success.

Social Activism: Coding for language which indicated opportunity or expectation of connections to social activism.

SJE-Potential Opportunity: Used to code language in policy which indicate opportunities for social justice education, based in content as well as professional practice.

SJE-Learner Accommodations: Used to code language which indicated a need for special consideration and potential accommodation for students based in social justice education components, such as English language learners.

SJE-Explicit Opportunity: Coding which utilized explicit language connected to social justice education [components].

SJE-Diversity & Culture: Used to code language specifically highlighting diversity and culture.

SJE-Diverse Learners: Used to code specific 'diverse learner' phrasing and terminology.

Professional Reflection: Utilized to differentiate between general professional reflection over practice rather than critical reflection connected to professional practice and attitudes connected to social justice.

Professional Learning: Included policy language and components specifically based in professional learning-both opportunities as well as expectations.

Professional Learning Terminology: Used to code pertinent terms and phrases within Appendices and Glossaries.

Professional Learning Promulgation(s): Used to code professional learning declarations.

Professional Learning Goals: Coding for all goals associated with professional learning, including the district, school, and individual levels.

Professional Learning Design: Used to code policy language based in [quality] professional learning design to ensure effective staff development as well as meet state professional learning guidelines.

Professional Learning Design-Points: Due to a large amount of information dedication to professional development points, this code was added. The researcher acknowledges it does not readily apply to the components of the research questions but recognizes its value within professional learning policy.

Professional Learning Design-Example: Used to code the extensive examples present throughout policy, allowing for researcher consideration over processes and decisions demonstrated within examples.

Professional Learning Authorities: Indicates individuals and groups who would be considered as in a place of power or provided decision-making capacities associated with professional learning activities.

Professional Knowledge: Supports the reality that sometimes the text may demonstrate an area that notes what should be professional knowledge rather than explicit professional expectation.

Professional Expectation: Supports policy language and components associated with professional expectations, both within general educator standards as well as specific expectations outlined within content standards.

Professional Diversity: Used to code the few policy components which highlighted value over professional diversity concepts, including policy development committees.

Professional Application(s): Utilized when text demonstrated values placed on professional application of good teaching to support intended outcome(s). This denotes quality professional work above what is explicitly stated as knowledge or expectation.

Individual Professional Learning: Used to code professional learning expectations and components focused on an individual level, including professional standards.

Educational Stakeholders: Used to code components of policy which highlight the individuals involved in the policy design, whether through contribution of ideas and content or decision-making capacity.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Coding used to indicate various components of culturally responsive teaching, including high expectations for all learners, responsiveness to student diversity, selection of teaching resources, consideration in lesson design and assessment, as well as effective classroom practices. This was also used to code policy components which utilized the phrasing 'Culturally Relevant Pedagogy' which is similar in components as well as [professional] intention.

Critical Social Values: Used to code language demonstrating value for social traits and skills associated with student success.

Critical Social Issues: Used to code policy language which encompassed social issues through a critical lens.

Critical Social Awareness: Used to code policy language highlighting social awareness through a critical lens.

Critical Reflection: Used to code purposeful reflection through a critical lens.

Critical Dialogue: Used to code dialogue and collaborative discussion associated specifically with a critical lens.

Collaborative Professional Learning: Indicates professional learning based in collaborative efforts among professionals, which could include dialogue, reflection(s), and collective consciousness/awareness.

Round Two Codes

Policy Intention: Used within each policy to highlight language explicitly outlining policy purpose.

Knowledge Needed for Effective SJE: Coding observes components of policy where practitioners would require professional knowledge of social justice education in order for effective application to occur.

Context-Student Learning: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in student learning components.

Context-Responsible Parties for Professional Learning: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in clarifying who is responsible for conducting professional learning opportunities and various components (ranging from individual growth to professional development councils).

Context-Professional Learning Expectations: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in the expectations connected to professional learning.

Context-Professional Learning Component: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in the varying components of professional learning, including the separate areas of expectations demonstrated within professional standards, as well as state-based expectations of components for school improvement planning.

Context-Professional Expectation: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in professional expectations, including practitioner roles within use of policy, as well as professional standards and development.

Context-Policy Makers and Participants: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in who contributed to the different policies used for this study.

Context-PL SIP RBSD Planning: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in the specific areas of *professional learning*, *school improvement plan(s)*, and *results-based staff development*.

Context-Kansas' Students Long Term Success: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in specific policy components focused on traits aligned to Kansas' values and the determination of success in line with those values.

Context-Individual PD Plan: Focused on demonstrating policy context based specifically in individual professional development planning.

Context-District-Agency PD Plan: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in the parameters of professional development plans within a district/educational agency.

Context-District Responsibility: Focused on demonstrating policy context based in what is considered district responsibility concerning professional expectations extending from professional development (processes and design) as well as roles in leadership and practitioner supports.

Clarity Needed-Who is Responsible to Facilitate: Used to code policy language or components requiring clarification over who would be responsible to facilitate policy components, including professional leadership as well as specialized staff development aligned to the expectation of practitioner growth.

Clarity Needed-SJE Supported within This Learning: Used to code policy language or components requiring clarification over policy language where there could potentially be disagreement among various policy reviewers and practitioners whether social justice education is supported within the content or not.

Clarity Needed-District or School Responsibility to Facilitate: Used to code policy language or components requiring clarification over vague language over professional provisions, such as practitioner growth opportunity according to professional expectations, which lacks clarity over district or school building responsibility for facilitation.

Clarity Needed-Culturally Responsive Teaching as an Expected Component: Used to code policy language or components requiring clarification over generic language regarding expected professional practices which could be interpreted as culturally responsive teaching.

Assumption-Taught with SJE Application: Used to code policy language where the reviewer assumed an expectation of social justice application on the part of the practitioner.

Assumption-Practitioners Know This and Actively Integrate: Used to code policy language where the reviewer assumed an expectation of professional knowledge and application which the reviewer questioned as realistic.

Assumption-Practitioners Can Facilitate Their Growth Effectively: Used to code policy language where the reviewer assumed an expectation of practitioners taking on their own growth and accomplishing effective measures/gains.

Assumption-Practitioner Knowledge to Accommodate Student Demographics and Learning Needs: Used to code policy language where the reviewer assumed an expectation of practitioners holding natural knowledge of supporting and accommodating varying student demographics and academic needs.

Round Three Codes

Umbrella Phrasing to Cover Effective Classroom Structures: Used to code generic and commonly used phrases which indicated effective classroom structures and [instructional] practices.

Umbrella Phrasing to Cover All Learners Including Ability and Diversity: Used to code generic and commonly used phrases which discussed learners through a focus on ability and diversity components.

SJE Language: Used to code language indicating social justice education and associated components.

Formal Educational Language-Professional Growth and Development: Used to code formal language based in professional growth and development components.

Formal Educational Language-Evaluation: Used to code formal language based in practitioner evaluation.

Formal Educational Language-Critical Competencies: Used to code formal language based in critical competencies, including both practitioner competencies as well as those outlined for students within learning frameworks.

Educational Depth Through Critical Pedagogy: Used to code policy components which indicated increased depth according to critical pedagogical components (including reflection, dialogue, and consciousness).

Discourse Lens-Influence Elementary VS Secondary: Acknowledgement of Discourse lens impact and influence based in elementary and secondary roles.

Discourse Lens-Quality Parameters Professional Learning: Acknowledgement of Discourse lens impact and influence based in perceptions of what qualifies as quality within professional learning parameters.

Discourse Lens-Kansans: Acknowledgement of Discourse lens impact and influence based in Kansans' perspectives, values, and goals.

Discourse Lens-Critical Practices and Professional Learning: Acknowledgement of Discourse lens impact and influence based in recognition of what is deemed critical within professional practice and learning.

Discourse Lens-Collaborative Professional Learning: Acknowledgement of Discourse lens impact and influence based collaborative professional learning communities.

Discourse Lens-SJE or CRT Lens: Acknowledgement of Discourse lens impact and influence based in professional knowledge and comfort with social justice education and culturally responsive teaching processes.