The Middle Social Studies Curriculum as a Site of Struggle for Social Justice in Education

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Abstract
Given that teachers face a daily reality constrained by standardized tests, accountability measures, curriculum mandates, and neoliberal policies, this chapter examines the role of curriculum, specifically middle school social studies curriculum, as part of the larger struggle, a contested site, for social justice in education.

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This chapter is based on three related assumptions located across the academic literature relevant to the topic: (1) Questions about curriculum are questions about knowledge and power. Students and society benefit from critiquing so-called “rational,” “common-sense,” and “value-free” curricular decisions; (2) middle school students not only can recognize and name injustice but can also reflect on the deep institutional, structural, and sociocultural rationale behind endemic inequality; and (3) the notion of curriculum as a space, a material, and relational site of action presents a fruitful path forward in resisting conventional assumptions about what should be taught.

The organization of the chapter is as follows. First, the author presents current academic literature that expands upon the three assumptions mentioned, specifically links between curriculum, power, and social justice in middle grades social studies education, and the potential of conceptualizing curriculum as a contested space. The author builds on the outlined assumptions by presenting established models specific to teaching for social justice in the social studies. The chapter continues with a brief introduction to five broader pedagogical and curriculum frameworks that are neither social studies nor middle school specific but are commonly used by educators to support, complement, or conceptualize a middle school, social justice, and social studies curriculum. Finally, a conclusion outlines future opportunities and challenges for the middle grades social studies curriculum as a site of struggle for social justice in education.

Keywords

Middle level education · Social studies · Social justice · Spatial analysis · Social studies curriculum

Introduction

Gloria Ladson Billings says, “We teach what we value” (Paris & Alim, 2017). Thus, in an era of scripted lesson plans, uncompromising accountability schemes, high-stakes testing, and standardized curriculum, schools largely value neoliberal and individualist worldviews rather than efforts to interrogate and change entrenched inequities (Apple, 1993a). In this restrictive environment, teachers that leave preservice programs with the intention and training to center social justice in their classrooms enter school contexts constrained by mandated curriculum and narrow standards (Agarwal, 2011; Chandler, 2016). Teacher effectiveness is not based on how students learn to question and read the world around them (Freire, 1970) but by how their pupils score on a test. The incessant spector of testing, and other forms of teacher surveillance, control the work of teachers (Apple, 2013), deny the existence of structural inequalities under the guise of objectivity and merit (Au, 2016), and cast a long shadow over the forms of knowledge, content, and pedagogies associated with curricular decisions (Au, 2007). Taking this constrained reality as a starting point, this chapter examines

the role of curriculum, specifically middle school social studies curriculum, as part of the larger struggle, a contested site, for social justice in education.

Questions of curriculum get to the heart of what a society portends to be the purpose of schooling. Decisions over what to teach (and what/who to leave out) are productive in the sense they establish the basic outlines of what people should know and thus construct the "normal" for an "educated" person. Apple (1993b) describes what is at stake in curricular decisions, "one of the most critical issues we will face will be what our students will be like – what they will know, what values they will have" (p. 313). Instead of daring "to build a new social order" (Counts, 1932/1978), traditional school curriculum corresponds to an aim of schooling that "matches individuals with the existing social and economic order" (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002; Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 5). The necessary steps to transform school curriculum, and schools more generally, to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to experience success are incongruent with current status quo policies (Banks, 2016) that favor the needs of big business rather than equitable social change. In short, the current curriculum prepares students for life as economic beings (Attick, 2017) within a rather flimsy narrative that states we must train kids for the jobs of tomorrow and a "future that has not been invented" (Doxtdator, 2017; Watters, 2016), despite the fact that so many languish in an unjust present defined by white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, class exploitation, ableism, and racist nativism.

However, in defiance to the challenges outlined above there are many educators who reject the current state of affairs by creating a socially just curriculum, developing critical hope with their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) and emphasizing the values of love, equity, and justice (King, Vickery, & Cafrey, 2018). These teachers find ways to teach for social justice in myriad ways, leveraging opportunities to create meaningful inquiry around relevant social issues (Ayers & Ayers, 2011) and subversively stretching the possibilities of their everyday, standardized curriculums (Agarwal-Rangnath, Dover, & Henning, 2016; Ligocki, 2017). As such, this chapter locates the middle school social studies curriculum as an underappreciated and intriguing space to contest neoliberal and individualist viewpoints while supporting the needs of a multicultural and pluralistic democracy.

This chapter is based on three related assumptions across the academic literature relevant to the topic: (1) Questions about curriculum are questions about knowledge and power. Students and society benefit from critiquing so-called "rational," "common-sense," and "value-free" curricular decisions; (2) middle school students not only can recognize and name injustice but can also reflect on the deep institutional, structural, and sociocultural rationale behind endemic inequality; and (3) the notion of curriculum as a space, a material, and relational site of action, presents a fruitful path forward in resisting conventional assumptions about what should be taught.

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contested space. The author builds on the outlined assumptions by presenting established models specific to teaching for social justice in the social studies. The chapter continues with a brief introduction to five broader pedagogical and curriculum frameworks that are neither social studies nor middle school specific but are commonly used by educators to support, complement, or conceptualize a middle school, social justice, and social studies curriculum. Finally, a conclusion outlines future opportunities and challenges for the middle grades social studies curriculum as a site of struggle for social justice in education.

The Curriculum, Power, and Social Justice

The Curriculum

Before looking at social justice in the curriculum, specifically the social studies curriculum, it is helpful to lay out a basic understanding of the term curriculum. Curriculum is a rather nebulous and contested notion. Teachers and theorists alike disagree on a singular definition, but broadly understood curriculum accounts for the educational experiences, both explicit and implicit, of students at schools (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2010). Just as teaching is political (Giroux, 2011), so too are debates and battles about what should be learned in schools. Infamous battles over curriculum such as The Great Textbook War in West Virginia (Kay et al., 2015), the fight over Mexican American Studies in Tucson, Arizona (McGinnis & Palos, 2011), and contemporary debates over the Common Core are famous examples that showcase local, regional, and national contestation. (A number of references in this article, like the Great Textbook War, are blogs, podcasts, and other media. Links for such material is provided in the reference section.) These recognizable cases typically involve disputes over the official curriculum that is what state and district officials set forth in documents such as benchmarks, standards, and curricular materials (Cuban, 1995). The official curriculum, however, is just one part of the larger picture of curriculum.

Additional layers of the curriculum include the taught, learned, hidden, and null curriculum. Although teachers often feel constrained by the official curriculum, teachers do have some degree of power regarding their teaching of it. This act of translation, the taught curriculum, may diverge from the official curriculum when the "classroom door is shut." Furthermore, the learned curriculum is what students take away from the teacher (Cuban, 1995). Expanding the notion of learned curriculum is Jackson's (2013) pioneering insight into the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum consists of the implicit norms, values, and social instructions that students must master to make their way through school. These unspoken "rules of the game" include everything from obedience as a classroom expectation (raising hands, asking for help, seeking permission for the restroom) to schoolwide rituals like prom king and queen that reinforce a hidden curriculum of compulsory heterosexuality (Pascoe, 2011). Part of the hidden curriculum is the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985) which refers to things, typically content, that are consciously not taught and avoided. Related to a social justice

curriculum, teachers neglect topics like race, gender, class, immigration status, and sexual orientations for fear of repercussions or discomfort (Delpit, 1995; Fairman, 2016; Gallo & Link, 2016, Jefferies & Dabach, 2014, Thornton, 2013). Thus, Brownell (2017) in a letter to first year teachers calls for more nuanced reflection and exploration of all the subtleties of curriculum, especially the hidden curriculum, so “that, we, as an educational community and society at-large, can progress toward more just social futures” (p. 212). Teachers and schools looking to develop a socially just curriculum can look to these various notions of curriculum as starting points for change, but ultimately must see how they all come together to reinforce a larger curriculum that continues to marginalize, rather than transform.

Power

The large puzzle of curriculum, including its many smaller pieces, reveals basic questions about what students should know and how they should know it. Curriculum is a serious epistemological or knowledge-forming endeavor (Scott, 2014), and at heart, it is a problem of power and it relationship to knowledge. The official curriculum establishes what and whose knowledge a society deems legitimate. Traditionally, such official knowledge (Apple, 2000) reinforces dominant (white European) ways of knowing the world as the cultural knowledge of marginalized groups is largely excluded from state standards, assessments, and curriculum writ large (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). To this point, former high school history teacher Prentice Chandler (2016) wonders, “I was perplexed about why it was appropriate to read the protest writings of Thomas Jefferson, but not the protest writings of the Native leader Black Hawk” (p. 357). Another common example to illuminate how the dominant culture(s) creates historical narratives with the curriculum is how Christopher Columbus is typically portrayed as a valiant hero, but few can describe the indigenous Taino peoples who were there at the time of conquest (Bigelow, n.d.).

Yet constructs such as official knowledge tend to emphasize how curriculum is the outcome of one group exerting power in a hierarchical and unilateral manner from “on high,” rather than seeing power as diffuse (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Power acts, it is a tool (Heller, 1996). Hence, it is helpful to think of the curriculum as a technology of power, one that “seeks conformity by controlling people’s thoughts and desires,” (Webb, 2009, p. 25) one’s version of the truth. Power and knowledge are closely linked, *working* to construct legitimate regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) and to define “common-sense” ways of knowing and acting. This is directly related to questions of curriculum and what gets taught. By understanding power’s role in the construction of knowledge and the resulting impact on curriculum and pedagogical practices (Popkewitz, 1998), it is possible to critique so-called “rational,” “common-sense,” and “value-free” curricular interventions and decisions. This also allows the teacher to place social justice at the heart of a desire to “open up the possibility of different ways of thinking, ‘seeing’, and acting as we collectively struggle to make schooling a more just and equitable institution” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 137).

Social Justice

Although it is outside the aim of this chapter to offer a detailed conceptualization of social justice, it is important to outline a working definition of the term. At a basic level, social justice is about questioning the causes, perpetration, and long-term effects of various inequities in society while at the same time working to bring about positive social change. Social justice is action based, it is a process and a goal that works to achieve more equitable distribution of resources (Bell, 2016). However, as Gewirtz (1998) argues, social justice is not only about more equitable distribution of resources but also about the "nature and ordering of social relations" (p. 471). Social justice work questions the organization of social relations at micro and macro levels including the political systems humans build and the practices and procedures of social institutions (Gewirtz, 1998). For this reason, social justice is more complex than efforts to increase "diversity," no matter how important such work may be (Jay, 2003; Nieto, 2000). Correspondingly, while social justice education interrogates the representation of various groups and works to increase "diversity" throughout the curriculum, there is a deeper need to critique the systemic conditions and understandings of truth that perpetuate such (mis)representations.

Social justice in education calls for teachers, students, and stakeholders to confront the structural inequalities that are woven into the social fabric of our society (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007). To this point, King and Kasun (2013) define a social justice education "as the pedagogical practice of guiding students toward critically discussing, examining, and actively exploring the reasons behind social inequalities and how unjust institutional practices maintain and reproduce power and privilege that have a direct impact on students' lives" (p. 1). It is precisely this examination into the institutional nature of structured inequality and unequal power relations that separates a rigorous social justice education from that of ephemeral displays of diversity and multiculturalism (Rodriguez, Monreal, & Howard, 2018). Therefore, changes to the curriculum must reflect a needed shift away from people, places, and dates to a deep and transformation knowledge of historical, spatial, sociocultural, and sociopolitical processes (Brown & Brown, 2010; Crowley & King, 2018). This is precisely the challenge and opportunity of a socially just social studies curriculum for the middle grades.

Middle Grades Education and the Middle Grades Social Studies Curriculum

Middle Grades Education

The field of Middle Grades Education focuses on the educational processes of young adolescents between the ages of 10–14 years old (Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group [MLER SIG], 2016) as this is a dynamic time in the life of children that deserves specialized study by

academic experts (Olofson & Bishop, 2018). Nagle (2018) states that a recent resurgence in middle grades research is the result of coordinated efforts by researchers to identify specific areas in need of robust inquiry. These efforts are lead by the Middle Level Educational Research Special Interest Group (MLER SIG) of the American Educational Research Association, and the group recently published a comprehensive research agenda to guide inquiry in the immediate future (MLER SIG, 2016). The MLER SIG initially identified eight areas of study within the field: (1) Educator development; (2) Organizational structures; (3) Cultural responsiveness; (4) Special populations; (5) Developmental aspects of young adolescents; (6) Social-emotional learning; (7) Digital technologies; and (8) Pedagogy before settling on three broad areas of scholarly interest in middle level education: young adolescents, teaching and learning, and middle schools and structures (MLER SIG, 2016; Olofson & Bishop, 2018).

The document and its outlined research agenda are undoubtedly important advances; however, a close investigation reveals a larger problem in the field. Within the 36 pages of influential readings, potential research questions, and defined terms, the phrase social justice appears just one time. Perhaps more alarming the term social studies is absent from the entire agenda. The lack of representation for social justice and social studies includes an absence of either word in a subsection on curriculum integration that instead emphasizes literary integration, personalized learning, and project-based learning as key areas of investigation. This is not to say issues of equity, marginalization, and injustice are absent from the research agenda, but rather there lacks a substantive initiative to pair social justice with the social studies curriculum at the middle grades level. Not surprising, then, there is a relative dearth of academic research that examines social justice and the middle school social studies curriculum (Busey & Russell III, 2016). In lieu of more specialized research on middle school social studies curriculum, the rest of the section highlights adolescent's desire and ability to engage with social justice issues, discusses teachers' general inability to capitalize on this interest, and reviews major literature about social justice in social studies curriculum generally.

Social Justice in the Middle School Social Studies Curriculum

Young adolescents are developmentally capable of engaging with curriculum that is challenging, equitable, participatory, and attentive to unjust power relationships (Edwards, 2015; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010) and there is evidence that they crave such learning (Busey & Russell III, 2016; Chandler, 2016). In their research on middle school Latino's perceptions of Social Studies, Busey and Russell III (2016); find that students desire to learn about the world around them, their own and classmates' cultures, and relevant issues like gender, race, and class. For example, one student in the study explained:

> I feel like not only me but everybody else feels like they don't teach us about stuff that we want to learn. We want to learn about our culture and other people. And kids

> like me, I want to learn about where I came from, how I started, and not only from the United States, but from our culture and every person's culture. I think that would be really cool. (Busey & Russell III, 2016, p. 10)

It comes as no surprise, then, that students embrace curriculum that challenges them to actively question the world around them by, say, creating a critical community documentary (Stovall, Calderon, Carrera, & King, 2009), organizing against school closures (Schultz, 2008), creating youth radio spaces (Ayers & Ayers, 2011), and maintaining indigenous cultural traditions like *danza* (Colín, 2014; Valenzuela, Zamora, & Rubio, 2015) rather than memorizing events and taking notes while listening to lecture (Russell III & Waters, 2010).

Skilled teachers also find various opportunities to connect past injustices with present inequities, in the process making Social Studies meaningful. In one such case, Monreal (2017) asks middle school students to consider if deficit-based perceptions about Latinx cultures are perpetuated through curriculum about the Aztec Empire. Textbooks and teachers alike commonly collapse the Aztec's entire way of life into the ceremony of human sacrifice, erasing other cultural achievements and contributions like the arts and philosophy. How might our view of Latinx culture be different today if the curriculum held them as brilliant philosophers and artists (León-Portilla, 1990, 2003; Maffie, 2014) akin to the conventional treatment of the Greeks and Romans?

In a similar vein, students can investigate the lasting and enduring consequences of United States' Westward "expansion" and events like the Mexican-American War (common topics in middle school U.S. History classes) by enlarging the curriculum to include films like *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (Esparza et al., 1982). The film shows how contemporary racial animus that equates Latinx immigrants to criminal threats (President Trump's incessant calls "to build a wall," Chavez, 2008; Rodriguez & Monreal, 2017) is not a new phenomena. In fact, unequal racial and power relations in the borderlands can be traced to deep processes of racialization that occurred before, during, and after the Mexican-American War and the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Monreal, 2018). However, despite adolescents' desire and ability to engage with relevant issues, and opportunities like those above to integrate contemporary social justice material into middle school social studies curriculum, research demonstrates that middle school teachers are largely unable or unwillingly to capitalize on these openings to transform the curriculum (Busey & Russell III, 2016; Conklin, 2010).

One reason why teachers struggle to transform the middle grades social studies curriculum is due to limited emphasis on social studies in the younger grades. Although there is academic literature relevant to socially just curriculum and instruction in elementary grades (Boutte, 2016; Hass, 2017; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Tyson & Park, 2006), it also holds true that instructional time held explicitly for social studies in elementary schools is declining relative the other three "core" subjects, math, science, and English language arts (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). In fact, according to Heafner and Fitchett's (2012) research into the marginalization of elementary social studies, "of the four core content areas, social

studies has experienced the most substantial curricular reappropriation resulting from standardization and testing mandates" (p. 202). At the other end, teachers trained to teach secondary social studies to high school students have difficulty translating this knowledge to young adolescents.

Another reason why teachers struggle to transform the middle grades social studies curriculum is due to its rather liminal place sandwiched between elementary and secondary education. Conklin (2010) describes middle school social studies teaching as a sort of "black hole" owning to the fact that few teachers have both specialized knowledge about middle school children *and* social studies. In her research on teacher preparation programs for middle school, social studies teachers one of two overlaps tended to occur. Either the teacher trains in a generalist elementary/middle school teaching program or they train for secondary social studies which is almost exclusively focused on high school pedagogy, curriculum, and students. The effects of this double bind are profound as the generalist-trained teachers held higher expectations and conceptions regarding the intellectual abilities of middle school students, but appeared less versed in social studies content knowledge. On the other hand, although secondary trained social teachers believed middle school social studies should develop student critical thinking and investigation, they stated that hands-on activities like food and models were most age appropriate for teaching the age. Perhaps it is this disconnect between knowing adolescents and knowing critical social studies material that caused fewer teachers in Conklin's (2010) study to believe the reason for middle school students to learn social studies was to make the world more just and equitable. With this understanding in hand, it is worthwhile to mention the flipside of Busey and Russell III's (2016) previously mentioned research on middle school Latino students' perception of social studies. While the students expressed eagerness and excitement to learn about social studies for social justice, they were treated to a "banking-style" pedagogy as their teachers relied mainly upon rote memorization, direct instruction, and the regurgitation of information. Echoing Conklin's research (2010), Busey and Russell III (2016) argue that middle school social studies is "lost in translation" and "it is imperative that social studies educators marry disciplinary tenets for pedagogy and curriculum with that of adolescent development" (p. 15). Fittingly, broad frameworks for social justice and social studies are not developed for the middle school student as we see next.

Social Justice and the Social Studies

A number of scholars provide models to clarify the ways in which social justice can specifically and intentionally intersect with a social studies education. These models provide a starting point to marry disciplinary content knowledge with critical consciousness and in the process rethink social studies curriculum. However, before taking up the models in more detail, it is important to highlight a few barriers to their usage in social studies classes outside of the shrinking of curriculum covered near the beginning of chapter. First, although social studies

offers a unique location to question past and present inequities while working for a more just future (Misco & Shiveley, 2016), "social studies education has, unfortunately, primarily been a mechanism that helps (re)produce dominant conceptions of our social world, while at the same time silencing and marginalizing localized, indigenous, and other ways of knowing" (DeLeon & Ross, 2010, p. x). This is to say social studies curriculum has traditionally reinforced United States' exceptionalism without problematizing the continued unjust treatment of various groups that makes up a major portion of the "American story." Second, these frameworks and models tend to be rather broad and focused at the high school level. While high school should be home to the development of critical thinking and intense questioning, it should not be the *only* place for such in a students' K-12 schooling experience. Further, as demonstrated previously in the chapter, elementary and middle school spaces typically neglect, for a variety of reasons, linking social studies and social justice. With this in mind, the rest of this section reviews three different models/frameworks for teaching social studies and social justice.

Misco and Shiveley's (2016) three part framework for operationalizing social justice in Social Studies Education rests on the assumption that "no discipline is better positioned to examine critical social issues from multiple perspectives" (p. 172). Misco and Shiveley (2016) argue social studies education is able to confront and to undermine social injustices by placing an emphasis on certain dispositions, reflective thinking, and controversial issues. The scholars offer the intentional development of certain dispositions, or habits of the mind, such as appreciation of diversity, open-mindedness, critical thinking, and tolerance for ambiguity as a starting point for the open analysis of social justice issues. As a result of developing these dispositions, students have the tools of mind to engage in critical reflective thinking; specifically they are more willing to sit with uncomfortable tensions raised by issues in the curriculum and critique previously held views about the world. The development of dispositions and reflective thinking prepares students and teachers for the "primary intersection of social justice and social studies" (Misco & Shiveley, 2016, p. 189) controversial issues. Thus, opening up the curricular space for examination and discussion of previously "taboo" topics should be a goal for social justice social studies educators (Hess, 2018). Similarly, Ayers and Ayers (2011) argue that no topic should be off limits and students benefit from questioning "norms" like military recruitment, nationalism, and capitalism. Simply stated, if teachers seek the classroom as a participatory space of democracy, they must acknowledge that classrooms are also contested spaces (Ayers & Ayers, 2011). In short, the curriculum should support student agency in questioning, critiquing, and problematizing the world around them (Freire, 1970), while also nurturing critical hope and love (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) to safeguard against the development of despair and endless antagonism. The next framework is more explicit in adapting a critical approach to social studies and social justice.

With the stated intent to offer social studies teachers a praxis and clarity about social justice education in social studies classrooms, King and Kasun (2013) also advance a three part framework. Rooted in the active exploration of how unjust institutional and structural inequities reproduce power and

privilege King and Kasun (2013) emphasize the principles of critical historical knowledge, critical sociopolitical literary, and application with agency. Critical historical knowledge calls for students to move beyond the uncomplicated retellings and narratives of dominant groups and towards the incorporation of multiple perspectives, particularly those of historically underserved communities. Shifting between micro and macro levels of analysis, students are encouraged to interrogate "common sense" and decontextualized renderings of history. King and Kasun (2013) use the example of Mexican food to illustrate their conceptualization. Too often, a "multicultural approach" is reduced to students bringing in "Mexican food" like tacos and burritos, whereas an emphasis on critical historical knowledge might begin with an investigation of the (spiritual and nutritional) importance of corn/maize for indigenous peoples and end with how/why Mexican immigrants often lose their relatively healthier and traditional diets when they come to the USA. A focus on critical sociopolitical literacy compels teachers, "to teach students to identify why and how knowledge is created and who its creators are and their interests" (King & Kasun, 2013, p. 3). Continuing the example of Mexican food, teachers can create lessons or units problematizing how marketing and economic pressures in combination with spatial realities like food deserts, influences new, unhealthy diets. (For a multimedia examination of these issues, see the episode NAFTA Diet from the podcast Latino USA (Cereijido, 2019)) Students might track television advertisements during certain programs, map food options in contrasting communities, and research the profit motivations of food companies while also identifying local individuals that resist such pressures in ingenious and novel ways using funds of knowledge approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Finally, application with agency calls for teachers to explicitly include activism and organization as part of the curriculum so students see a path forward to meaningful change that goes beyond critique and problematization. As Middleton (2016) argues "drawing conclusions and taking informed actions gives purpose to studying history" (p. 362) and "teaches students to [critically] transfer their learning of historical events to critical events" (p. 364). Furthermore, application with agency is in line with Standard Five, Professional Responsibility and Informed Action, of the National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers (NCSS, 2018) which calls for teacher candidates to advance their knowledge of social studies to advance social justice and human rights through informed action in schools/communities.

Building on King and Kasun's (2013) emphasis regarding critical analysis in the social studies as a tool to examine and transform society's unjust social relations, Crowley and King (2018) center critical inquiry in their framework. They assert inquiry is critical when it "confronts social injustices with the goal of transforming those unjust social relations" (Crowley & King, 2018, p. 14). Crowley and King (2018) offer three guidelines to craft critical inquiry in the Social Studies curriculum: (1) create compelling questions that explicitly critique systems of oppression and power, (2) center the narratives of marginalized groups and people, and (3) develop tasks and informed action activities that push students towards

alleviating injustice (p. 16). Through the active nature of critical inquiry, a social justice social studies curriculum becomes more than integrating content from a variety of cultures (Banks, 2016). Instead, such a curriculum is active in that it requires students to interrogate the macro and micro sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts that (re)produce and (re)create the worlds they are tasked to transform.

A key feature of all three models/frameworks, but particularly the latter two, is a deep investigation of larger structural and institutional ties that support and maintain systems of inequality. Sustained inquiry of these sociopolitical and sociocultural realities, of which middle school students are capable of doing, is thus at the heart of a transformative social justice, social studies education. As Hackman (2005) succinctly writes, "To be most effective, social justice education requires an examination of systems of power and oppression combined with a prolonged emphasis on social change and student agency in and outside of the classroom" (p. 104). The point bears emphasis because too often well-meaning teachers create "special" lessons in the name of social justice, say for Black History Month, that ephermerally highlight heroes and individual effort without greater attention to institutional mechanisms of marginalization.

A greater focus on the complex sociopolitical and sociocultural processes of history and social studies calls for a fundamental shift in how teachers view the curriculum. To this point, Brown and Brown (2010) outline three major problems with historical narratives that deal with race in the school curriculum: (1) hagiographic, non-controversial hero narratives, (2) essentializing racial constructs, and (3) presenting partial and misrepresented stories (p. 141). For example, curriculum about the Jim Crow Era highlights the acts of individuals associated with the KKK enabling students to pin racial violence on the acts of a "few bad men," without attention to the institutional/systemic ties that maintained (and continue to maintain) racialized political and economic systems (Brown & Brown, 2010). As Luis Urrieta Jr. (2004) argues in his research about the K-12 social studies experiences of Latinx educators, uncritical portrayals of US history that leave aside legacies of white supremacy lead educators to "assert that discourses assumed to be transformative are also in danger of reinscribing normalize practices the maintain the status quo" (p. 443). Although Urrieta Jr.'s research focuses on the intersections between the United States and Latin America, a general neglect of nuanced sociopolitical realities is similarly displayed in textbook treatment of Muslims and September, 11 (Saleem & Thomas, 2011), historical understandings of immigration (McCorkle, 2018), and curriculum about Asia (Hong & Halvorsen, 2010). In other words, without interrogating sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts, social justice education is reduced to essentialization (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), festive celebrations to increase "awareness" (Grant & Sleeter, 2006; Urrieta Jr., 2004), and a general view that present inequities are unrelated to past injustice (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Such an uncritical stance (re)affirms deficit thinking towards marginalized groups as "poor dears," (Ladson-Billings, 2006) the object of decontextualized and misguided empathy (Rodriguez et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2013). Yet, in a quest to move past such simplified renderings, envisioning the curriculum as a site, a space of struggle, both in a physical and relational sense, rather than a set of

fixed knowledges provides educators a path forward to transforming middle school social studies into a pathway for deep social justice work.

Curriculum as Site

Space

In what is referred to as the "spatial turn" (Baroutsis, Comber, & Woods, 2017; Helfenbein & Taylor, 2009; Middleton, 2013; Monreal, 2016), education researchers have become more interested in the dynamic and productive impacts of school spaces. Rather than looking at educational sites as static "containers" (Baroutsis et al., 2017), the forgotten scenery where education takes place, Lefebvre (1992) writes, "[representational] space is alive: it speaks" (p. 42). This perspective holds that space(s) are socially constructed, ever changing arenas, that actors are constantly building and are built in. Thus, humans are not just social beings but spatial beings as well. To this point Henri Lefebvre (1992), in his landmark treatise *The Production of Space*, argues, "[humans] have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself" (p. 129). Building on Lefebvre's footprint, Soja (1996) contends that "there is no unspecialized social reality" (p. 46) and insists that the spatiality of human life should be "infused into every discipline and discourse" (p. 46). Hence, Soja (1996) calls on us to privilege spatial understandings of the world on par with traditional temporal and social analysis.

However, as Rodriguez (2017) explains most conceptualizations of space occur through the lens of critical geography essentializing, the "dualisms of subjectivity of marginalized groups" ignoring the need to "generate a more nuanced, fluid conceptualization of space" (p. 81). By focusing on the relationships that create space (Rodriguez, 2013, 2017), in addition to more traditional spatial materials and geographic markers, it is possible to see how individuals might disrupt and (re)configure spaces like schools, and even more specifically the school curriculum. This is essential as Foucault notes that (relational) space functions as a technology of power to discipline individuals. To this point, Foucault (1977) writes, "disciplinary space [aims]. . .to know where and how to locate individuals. . .to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits" (p. 143). Managing the curriculum, an integral part of supervising, assessing, and disciplining, is a spatial act controlling the bodies, outlining what can be said and done, what counts for knowledge in a particular space (Baroutsis et al., 2017). For spatial webs of power both constrain and produce, while simultaneously creating possible sites of resistance. (Re)conceptualizing space as a network of (human and non human) relations allows for teachers to view the classroom and curriculum as a "space of possibility," a place to (re)imagine disciplinary processes, and open up a site of

becoming (Rodriguez, 2013). However, a radical reenvisioning of (curricular) space built on social justice is not an apolitical process; it is also a site for struggle.

Curriculum as (Contested) Space

Inherent in the construction of social studies curriculum are systems of reasoning and knowledge that become the loci for battles over a more socially just education (Popkewitz, 1998). Put another way, Hong and Halverson (2010) argue "school curriculum is a *location* [emphasis added] that *produces* [emphasis added] collective imaginations of other peoples and cultures, and, through this process, attempts to maintain a national identity" (p. 386). In this sense, the curriculum helps produce (and is produced in) a location, a site, a space where discursive ideas about what is "normal" and "true" about our relationships with others (social studies) takes concrete form. This understanding is vital because as Popkewitz (1998) maintains, "the 'outcome' of normalization processes are producing a space that children inhabit. . .this space, however, is no less 'real' than the geographic one" (p. 29). Such discourse takes material form as systems of knowledge when teachers create lesson plans, assessments, and use physical materials like textbooks and worksheets (Monreal, 2016). Furthermore, discourse is reinforced through relational webs of interspatial interconnectivity as communities of participants, namely students, compete to master the accepted truths espoused in the curriculum (Robertson, 2010). Technologies such as standardized tests extend these forms of relations outside of individual classrooms to an ever-expanding number of sites (Foucault, 1986; Soja, 1996). To push back, to struggle, and to offer a curriculum rooted in equity and justice, is a spatial act that contests the imposed territoriality (Soja, 1996) of uncritical understandings of the world.

Viewing the curriculum as *site* of spatial struggle, the home of territorializing battles over teacher and student cognition, calls on teachers to radically disrupt the knowledge landscapes that have been used for a certain disciplining of mind and deed (Webb, 2007, 2009). Problematizing the normal spaces of curriculum extends the "boundaries to organize thought, perception, feeling, and practice" (Popkewitz, 1991, p. 187). Similarly, critiquing so-called "rational," "common-sense," and "value-free" interventions like standardized curriculums allows educators to "open up the possibility of different ways of thinking, 'seeing', and acting as we collectively struggle to make schooling a more just and equitable institutions" (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 137). Given that middle school is already a liminal space, a space considered neither elementary nor high school, there is the opportunity for social justice educators to exploit this in-between. Thus, a middle school justice social studies curriculum challenges the very boundaries, and reimagines the landscape, of "accepted" and "official" knowledge and offers teachers and school personal a chance to identify and create further gaps to explore (Monreal, 2019). The rest of this chapter provides exemplars, examples, and ideas for opening up these spaces.

Curriculum as Spaces of Opportunity

A central feature of the following examples of socially just social studies curriculum are an acute understanding of the potentialities of intentionally viewing curriculum through a spatial lens. In this way, the boundaries of curriculum extend beyond the usual locales of high-stakes testing and narrow accountability. For example, Valenzuela (2017) explains the establishment and success of "Academia Cuauhtli," a community-based education partnership in East Austin, centering indigenous and familial ways of knowing and being to promote language and culture. By (re)locating ancient and spiritual knowledge as a "normal" territory of the present, the group created a "curriculum and pedagogy that would transform them from being *objects*, to being *subjects,* of history," (p. 909) in turn fostering a protective, liberatory space against colonization. A major part of the curriculum is the explicitly spatial act of using Aztec dance and ceremony, *Danza Mexica*, to recall a collectivity based upon shared movement and habitat in direct opposition to that individualism and competitiveness of modern schooling (Valenzuela et al., 2015). Similarly, Colín (2014) explains how such curriculum and pedagogy inherent in a *Danza* circle, as rigorous and demanding as contemporary education material, is discredited and considered problematic in schools. Yet, these intentional acts of space-making and resistance keep alive the community memory and ancestral wisdom that have allowed for minoritized groups to survive attempts at curricular erasure (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gonzales, 2015).

Another way to struggle towards socially just spaces of curriculum is to bring the places of the community into the classroom. Boutte (2016) suggests schools might learn from the empowering pedagogies and curriculum that lie at the heart of the African-American barbershop. Boutte (2016) argues that the barbershop is a place of success for African-Americans, "a classroom overflowing with lessons of academia and life...an alternative [space] to the traditional school classrooms by offering information, guidance, and values" (p. 147). How might middle school teachers cultivate this space, where relevant and relational curriculum is natural, in their classroom? A teacher might start by inviting a barber into their classroom to be interviewed by students. Building on this, the teacher can create an inquiry unit on hairstyles throughout history, the social dynamics of hair, and the creative power of culture. More specifically, in an ancient world history course, often a requirement for middle school, hair can be a theme explored through each unit starting with the hairstyles of Sumerian noblewomen, continuing with the thick beards of Babylonian men, and the shaved heads and wigs of Egyptians. Such investigations are not relegated to lands and times far away as teachers can also interrogate why United States' "forefathers" wore wigs (Boutte, 2016). These studies can be complemented by including specific books and picture books (McNair, 2008) like *Foluke: The Afro Queen* by Nefertari Hilliard-Nunn, *Rapunzel* (African version) by Fred Crump, and *Happy To Be Nappy* by bell hooks (Boutte, 2016).

Teachers can also challenge and push the borders of curricular spaces by explicitly including the voices and perspectives of LGBTQI+ people to create more inclusive school environments. Collins and Ehrenhalt (2018) explain that while creating physical spaces like bathrooms and locker rooms that match student's identities are essential to producing safe space, such efforts must extend to the curriculum. (Collins and Ehrenhalt (2018, p. 40) have a checklist, including curriculum practices, to assess how well a school is doing to meet the needs of your LGBTQ students) As such they write, "straight, cisgender students already see themselves in the curriculum. . .adding LGBTQI+ people to these spaces does not erase their peers who are already there; instead, it brings them together" (Collins & Ehrenhalt, 2018, p. 20). While a sixth grader may struggle to understand the notion that "the roles [and identities] of males and females are almost always socially constructed and not biologically determined" (Slattery, 2006, p. 150), there are many opportunities to create space within the curriculum for gender and sexual diversity. Thornton (2013) showed that even slight deviations from the explicit and official curriculum can produce rich opportunities to rethink stereotypes. When studying the Hellenistic world, the teacher might ask, "Why did the Greeks so prize the male form?" (Thornton, 2013, p. 335) Sumara and David (2013) use the classic young adult novel *The Giver* to create a critical, interpretive space for discussing sex and sexuality. Another idea is to leverage state standards about the Middle Ages and feudalism to create a nuanced lesson about "the code of chivalry" in the past and its implications today. As illuminated previously, the creation of such curricular materials is a spatial act that recognizes LGBTQI+ students and "celebrates their lives" (DeVita, Anders, & Weiser, 2016, p. 92).

Additional Curricular Frameworks and Conceptualizations

In the concluding portion of this chapter the author shares five broader pedagogical and curriculum frameworks that are neither social studies nor middle school specific, but might be, and have been, used to support, complement, or conceptualize a middle school, social justice, social studies curriculum. Although these descriptions are brief, I point to key literature and scholars for future reference. These five broad conceptualizations include (1) Culturally Relevant/Sustaining Pedagogy, (2) (youth) Participatory Action Research, (3) Critical Race Theory/Curriculum, (4) Post-structural Curriculum, (5) Place-based Curriculum.

Culturally Relevant/Sustaining Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) offers three basic tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP): (a) academic achievement, (b) developing student cultural competence, and (c) fostering sociopolitical consciousness. Academic achievement means "cultivating students' minds and supporting their intellectual lives"

(Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 38). The overriding focus of CRP is to develop curriculum and pedagogy that facilitates the academic success for all students, especially those most marginalized by current ways of "doing school." As such, CRP seeks ways for students to fulfill the academic expectations of the dominant culture while also questioning those demands. Cultural competence refers to students developing pride and recognition of their cultural beliefs and practices. In agreement with Delpit (1995), teachers must also foster a critical cultural competence and understanding of the workings of the dominant (white, middle class) culture. Finally, sociopolitical consciousness works with the idea that teachers must develop an understanding of the larger systems and structures that marginalize communities of color (and other oppressed groups). CRP does not offer a prescription or step by step list to teaching minoritized students; however, scholars such as Boutte (2016), Howard (2003), Milner (2014), Sleeter and Carmona (2016), and Villegas and Lucas (2002) explore its application, including at the middle school level.

Ladson-Billings (2014) acknowledges that CRP has taken on a life of its own and its implementation in many places leaves much to be desired, thus Paris (2012) offers an extension in his conceptualization of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). CSP begins with the assumption that pedagogy and curriculum need to be more than relevant, but central to the support and (re)vitalization of the unique linguistic and cultural experiences and practices of students. Paris and Alim (2017) state CSP, "sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (p. 1). Additionally, CSP warns against oversimplification of asset pedagogies, static and inflexible views of culture, and the slippery slope to essentializing groups. For instance, emphasizing only the heritage practices of marginalized groups disregards the reality that community practices are changing and dynamic and open to loving critique (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 90). An example of CSP in practice is Puente de Hózhǫ́, a school that successfully balances indigenous heritage education with the needs of local community. Scholars McCarty and Lee (2014) show how Puente de Hózhǫ́ offers a mixture of bilingual programs in Spanish, indigenous native language, and English to reflect the assets, wishes, and changes of the local population.

(Youth) Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) emerges from qualitative research and challenges traditional notions of knowledge production as nested solely within "objective" and positivist methods. PAR deconstructs the notion of "expert" by recognizing the "participant subject" is not a separate entity, but one who adds a unique set of skills, ideas, knowledges, and analysis. Thus, those working within a PAR paradigm reframe the research process as a collective journey based on experiential and practical knowing located within a community of inquirers (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). It is precisely the emphasis on collaborative

inquiry and the critique of knowledge production, a process that has traditionally been used as a tool for marginalization and colonization (Smith, 2012) that makes PAR relevant to a socially just social studies curriculum. Additionally, there has been considerable movement within the participatory paradigm to include decolonial and indigenous methodologies to challenge academic research that has traditionally been used as a tool of oppression against indigenous groups (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012). The overall thinking being that indigenous peoples and other colonized groups should no longer be solely an object of research but rather co-creators of research (and by extension their own curriculum). In short, PAR encourages communities to interrogate their own problems, seek their own solutions, and represent their own findings, all the while demonstrating that co-created, transformative knowledge need not be trapped within the privileged and exclusive domains of academia.

Claiming that students and young people can "conduct their own PAR projects" (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 54), scholars such as Cammarota and Fine (2008) and Tuck et al. (2008) develop the notion of youth participatory action research (yPAR) that centers young people and their experiences. yPAR is collective, expansive, interdisciplinary, intersectional, and critical, and actively engages students in developing their own praxis to question larger systems of marginalization that cause injustice. Thus, with yPAR as a backdrop, the middle school social studies curriculum starts with student lives, communities, and experiences, "to study their contexts through research and apply their knowledge to discover the contingent qualities of life" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6). Examples of yPAR include Vecchio et al.'s. (2017) photovoice research with middle school and teenage migrant youth in rural New York; Turner, Hayes, and Way's (2013) use of hip hop production and critical media literacy; and the Social Justice Education Project with Latinx youth in Tucson, Arizona (Cammarota & Romero, 2009). For further reading on yPAR, Cammarota and Fine's (2008) edited book, *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*, provides exemplars, insights, and responses by highly-regarded scholars.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) develops out of critical legal studies as scholars such as Bell (1992, 2005) critique the failure of so-called progressive academic movements to account for the centrality of race in the United States. CRT theorists posit that racism is natural, if not innocuous, and "normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado, 1995, as quoted in Ladson-Billings, 1998). Thus, one cannot conceive of racial justice without understanding "how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xii). Claims of color-blindness, merit, objectivity, and reverse racism, along with the belief that racism is an individual deficiency, a thing of the past, work to maintain systems of racial subordination. Hence, CRT scholars hold that racism is maintained through the use

of institutional practices and systems to treat "the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiv). The more we treat racism as a personal defect, the more we entrench its institutional power. Further, many CRT scholars take the position of racial realists, as they maintain racism is a permanent, enduring, and organizing feature of this world.

CRT is applicable to education in exposing the central role racism, in both macro and micro ways, takes in perpetuating educational inequities. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) posit five themes that form the basic perspectives of a CRT framework in education: (1) The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (2) the challenge to dominant ideologies, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the interdisciplinary approach (pp. 312–315). A CRT curriculum takes these insights and interrogates the structures and discourses which present specific knowledge in schools. As such, Yosso (2002) offers a CRT curriculum that builds upon the five tenets of CRT in education by directing the formal curriculum towards social justice, using and developing counter stories and other narratives that bring the experiences of students of color into the classroom, and incorporating ethnic studies and similar disciplines into the classroom. In practice, a CRT curriculum might critique E.D. Hirsch's (1988) *Cultural Literacy* by developing *dichos* (sayings/proverbs) used at home (Yosso, 2002), problematizing notions like "we are all immigrants," (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and bringing Black youth life histories and experiences and #BlackLivesMatter movement into the classroom (Johnson, 2018).

Post-Structuralist Views of Curriculum

Whereas structural theories like Critical Race Theory seek to expose the essential qualities of underlying, fixed structures (i.e., white supremacy) that invariably perpetuate marginalization, post-structuralists take a different approach to issues of social transformation, and social justice in the curriculum. Rather than a modernist inquiry to reveal the elemental and sacred truths of structural inequities, a post-structural lens to social change investigates the way discourses within socio-historic contexts create these ideas of timeless, taken-for-granted, and structural truths (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 464). Thus, post-structural thinkers avoid binaries, dichotomies, and "clean-breaks," preferring multiplicity and ambiguity to circular dialectical conflict. In contrast to the certainty of reductive categories and constructions, a post-structural curriculum, then, goes beyond, disrupts, and thinks the difference between dualisms. Pinar (2008) writes, "It is to introduce paradox. It is not to stop defining, but to multiply the definitions" (p. 497). Taking an expansive view, a post-structural frame broadens the idea of curriculum to open a "conversation without limits" that might include further theorization of such disparate topics as country music, vampires, and cyborgs in post-humanity (Livingston, 2005, p. 2). Although, it might be difficult to envision a middle school curriculum with such open spaces,

it is possible for teachers to search their curriculum for lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) bridging present practices to new ones (Livingston, 2005).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) envision these lines of flight as a way of linking current fault lines (structures or stata ripe with opportunity and potential) to radical new systems of being and thinking. Lines of flight are part of the rhizome, a messy, interconnected, multiplicitous network that sends out roots and spreads looking for the next connection. In describing the rhizome Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, "Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple pathways" (p. 12). In short, like the learning process, "a rhizome has no beginning or end." (Cormier, 2011, par. 2). Hence, ambiguity, uncertainty, and incoherence guide the post-structural search for entry points and spaces ripe with potential to subvert standardized and dominant constructions of curriculum (Miller, 2010). Above all, this process is generative, anticipating what the future holds rather than a perpetual reaction to "what happened" (Livingston, 2005, p. 2).

Place-Based

A place-based curriculum is a holistic approach to education that starts with the context of the local community as a launching point for inquiry and instruction (Callejo Pérez, 2010). Callejo Pérez (2010) writes that contemporary conceptions of place-based education start with the assumption that students should know and understand the historical, sociological, ecological, and political traditions of their immediate locales. Place-based approaches occur in both rural and urban spaces. In rural locales, students might investigate changing economies, diminishing fish stocks, and interactions between seasonal residents/visitors and local (Howley, Howley, Camper, & Perko, 2011; Smith & Sobel, 2010) In urban places, students can use create oral histories around monuments and landmarks and engage in critical walking tours to interrogate how and why certain stories get told in their local community (Taylor, 2018). Relevant to all types of communities, Boutte (2016) suggests the concept of micro-ethnographies as a way for teachers and students to locate the curriculum outside of the classroom, get out of the building, and seek the strengths and wisdom of local residents. Boutte (2016) argues that spending extensive time in the community is especially important for teachers to establish culturally responsive family-school involvement and to build an assets-based approach to the places students' live. Similarly, Popielarz (2018) reveals the necessity of using the community *as* curriculum for preservice social studies teachers. In this way, beginning social studies teachers will be more likely to ask/reimagine what empowering, meaningful, and relevant social studies looks like in service to inclusive, sustainable, and equitable local communities (Popielarz, 2018).

Place-based curriculum and practice also offers opportunities for decolonial approaches to schooling. Simpson (2014) and Tuck and Yang (2012) point out the

land itself comprises our ontologies, our epistemologies, our pedagogies, and our spirituality. Hence, efforts to bring about a more socially just, decolonial schooling practice, necessitate an intimate (re)connection to reclaiming the wisdom and knowledge tied to place and space. Specifically centering indigenous knowledge through place, Simpson (2014) writes young people should learn, "both *from* the land and *with* the land" (p. 7) and continues, "We cannot carry out the kind of decolonization our ancestors set in motion if we don't create a generation of land based, community based intellectuals and cultural producers who are accountable to our nations and whose life work is concerned with the regeneration of these systems" (p. 13). A focus on place also emphasizes the historical and contemporary material consequences that systems such as colonialism and racism have on the lives of individuals. However, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue place-based education can reinscribe colonial processes if teachers view place as simply a physical site, something they can use without intentional fluency in the larger sociopolitical and historical actions that strip Indigenous peoples of their sovereignty. In conclusion, by centering place in the curriculum, students can research and act on real world social justice issues that they have intimate knowledge and experience with.

Conclusion

Given that teachers face a daily reality constrained by standardized tests, accountability measures, curriculum mandates, and neoliberal policies, this chapter examined the role of curriculum, specifically middle school social studies curriculum, as part of the larger struggle, a contested site, for social justice in education. Recognizing that both social studies as a subject, and middle school as a place, operate in a liminal area between elementary and high school and the demands of other "core" classes presents educators with both a problem and an opportunity. The problem is that middle school social studies are a sort of "black hole," a place where relatively few teachers are specifically trained, and eager, to tackle. The notion of social justice as an integral part of the social studies adds another layer to the challenges of middle school, especially as many of the social justice pedagogical and curricular models are designed for high school students. However, opportunity lies in that middle school social studies is ripe for nascent curricular theorization, exciting ideas, and specific social justice frameworks. In short, centering social justice in the middle school social studies curriculum is a line of flight brimming with possibility. As such, the chapter presents the idea of pushing the boundaries of middle school social studies by recognizing its spatial qualities and nature, the hope being that practitioners, researchers, and students take on the task of opening new territories of thought and action. In this way, social justice in the middle school social studies curriculum is a productive site of struggle that creates places of becoming and spaces for transformation.

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