

K-12 EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES AND DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE
EDUCATION IN HAWAI‘I

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of a diverse group of K-12 educators in Hawai‘i, exploring the factors that shaped their orientation towards social justice education (SJE) and their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE in their work as educators. The framework of settler colonialism highlighted the fact that there can be no social justice without recognition of the particular histories, rights, and claims of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi communities in a settler society. Using a hybrid phenomenological approach, I surveyed and interviewed K-12 educators in Hawai‘i who self-identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation. Participants asserted that their orientations towards social justice were shaped by (a) situated, relational identities; (b) experiences with erasure and devaluation of identities; (c) complex, non-linear conscientization processes; and (d) educator identity as a response to lived experiences. In defining SJE, participants focused on equity and empowerment through skills, knowledge, and civic engagement, which provided ways for students to transform their communities. Participants also defined SJE as responsive to identities and place. Some educators grappled with awareness of outsider status, settler status, or specific injustices from past and ongoing settler colonialism. Others emphasized injustice as systemic rather than individual and reached beyond boundaries like disciplinary silos in their definitions. This study highlights resonances and gaps between SJE definitions and SJE in practice in K-12 Hawai‘i schools, and argues that SJE in Hawai‘i must (a) affirm identities in ways that include specific relationships to place and contexts, (b) attend to systems and histories, and (c) address ongoing injustices of settler colonialism with an awareness of varying positionalities.

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GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
‘aina	land, earth; to eat (Pukui & Elbert, 1986)
aloha ‘aina	love of the land or of one's country, patriotism (Pukui & Elbert, 1986)
kuleana	rights, responsibilities, and authority (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Warner, 1999)
lāhui	nation, race, tribe, people, nationality (Pukui & Elbert, 1986)
mo‘okū‘auhau	genealogy, one’s connections to people, places, and spaces (Balutski & Wright, 2016)
na‘au	intestines, bowels, guts; mind, heart, affections (Pukui & Elbert, 1986)
Pōhakuloa	Pōhakuloa is a 23,000-acre piece of land leased to the U.S. Armed Forces by the state of Hawai‘i in 1964 for 65 years, for \$1. The Pōhakuloa Training Area has been used for military and live-fire training. (Shin, 2019)
pono	goodness, uprightness, morality (Pukui & Elbert, 1986)
TERF	trans-exclusionary radical feminist, a person and especially a cisgender woman who rejects the social and legal recognition of transgender women as women and who opposes their inclusion in or access to places, activities, protections, etc. that are reserved exclusively for women (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
transplant educator	educators who moved to Hawai‘i to continue their work in education

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study examines the experiences of a diverse group of K-12 educators in Hawai‘i, exploring in detail the factors that shaped their orientation towards social justice education (SJE), and their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE in their current work as educators. The framework of settler colonialism highlights the fact that there can be no social justice without recognition of the particular histories, rights, and claims of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi communities in a settler society. Using a hybrid phenomenological approach, I surveyed and interviewed K-12 educators in Hawai‘i who self-identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation. This chapter provides some context for the impetus of this study, then introduces the theoretical framework of settler colonialism and how it relates to ideas of social justice education in Hawai‘i.

Framing this Study

I came to Hawai‘i as a transplant teacher in 2015. My experiences in two very different schools in Chicago, one public and one private, had already shaped my awareness of long-standing structural inequities in public and private education, as well as the necessity for and challenges around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among the more affluent, privileged populations of private schools. However, I did not have a broad sense of what SJE meant or looked like in my new context. In Hawai‘i I encountered direct and indirect messages about how things were different here because we are more diverse, or that the inequities may exist but appear less binary. I continued to wonder about the nature of education outside the gates of the prestigious private school where I taught, but it was only in graduate school that I gained more

critical awareness of Hawai‘i’s colonial history and the ongoing inequities of settler colonialism, which led to further questions about what SJE means in Hawai‘i.

In the spring of 2020, I took a course called Leaders of Social Justice in Education, which was a partnership between the College of Education at University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the Professional Development Center at Hanalei School, and the Learning for Justice project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. I started to get a sense of what social justice education meant for my classmates, who were educators from all over the state of Hawai‘i with diverse ways of implementing social justice action in their schools. I found myself inspired by these teachers’ stories, and my desire to learn more about their lived experiences motivated this study.

In Chapter 3 of this study I engage more deeply with my positionality in relation to this study, the research questions, and the participants. This chapter will introduce the theoretical framework of settler colonialism, providing a timeline of relevant historical events to contextualize the research questions of this inquiry, and draw possible connections to what social justice education might mean in Hawai‘i.

Settler Colonialism as a Theoretical Framework

Settler colonialism as a theoretical framework provides a deeper understanding of how coloniality shapes K-12 education in Hawai‘i today. Through the lens of settler colonialism, I explore if and how educators in Hawai‘i are responding to colonial structures through SJE. Beginning with a broad definition of settler colonialism, I then consider the specific nuances and complexities of Asian settler colonialism in the context of Hawai‘i, leading to an examination of how persistent settler colonial structures have an impact on education in Hawai‘i. Finally, I look at the dilemma of how researchers and educators might “decolonize” education in Hawai‘i, going

beyond logics of coloniality while embedded within educational systems historically entangled in the colonial enterprise, and if the concept of kuleana may inform possible alliances among educators and activists who occupy various social locations in relation to Hawai‘i as a place. By reaching beyond the idea of settler colonialism as a deterministic binary, this study suggests that educators can choose to define and implement SJE in ways that address ongoing settler colonial injustices.

Saranillio (2015) defines settler colonialism as:

a historically created system of power that aims to expropriate Indigenous territories and eliminate modes of production in order to replace Indigenous peoples with settlers who are discursively constituted as superior and thus more deserving over these contested lands and resources (p. 284).

This definition points out that the logics of settler colonialism are inextricable from issues of power, land, economics, and representation.

Settler colonialism is different from conventional colonialism, where colonial administrators and military occupied an “outpost” of the colonial enterprise, as directed by a remote colonial center (Fujikane, 2008). In conventional colonialism, the relationship between colonizer and colonized was based on the expropriation and exploitation of resources (Labrador, 2014). Settler colonialism has some additional characteristics: settlers came to stay, they occupied Indigenous lands, and they developed and reinforced systems that privileged themselves politically and economically while subjugating, displacing, and eventually eliminating the Indigenous peoples of that land (Fujikane, 2008; Labrador, 2014). Taking territory is central to settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006). Since this process is an ongoing one,

settler colonialism is never finished; it cannot be relegated to the past; it is an institutionalized form of invasion that is “a structure, not an event” (Wolfe, 2006).

Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i: A Timeline

The major historical events that laid the foundation for large-scale Asian settlement in Hawai‘i are inextricably connected to colonial processes. A broad timeline provides context for understanding how Asian settler colonialism has shaped education in Hawai‘i, an examination of educator responses to settler colonialism, and how SJE might be shaped by educators’ social locations in relation to Hawai‘i, which include (but are not limited to) their statuses as Native Hawaiian, settler or settler descendant, or transplant.

Table 1.

Timeline of Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i

1778	Population of Native Hawaiians estimated to be 800,000 to 1,000,000 (Fujikane, 2008; Warner, 2001) when Captain James Cook arrived (Balutski & Wright, 2016)
late 1700s	Arrival of foreigners to Hawai‘i introduced diseases that led to a severe collapse of the Native Hawaiian population (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992; Stannard, 1989; Trask, 1996)
1820s	Calvinist missionaries started arriving (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013)
1822	Introduction of printing press in Hawai‘i; high levels of schooling and literacy among Hawaiians (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013); majority of teachers in Hawaiian islands were Kānaka Maoli (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013)
1840s	Hawaiian Kingdom has international recognition as an independent country (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013); formation of a constitutional monarchy (Fujikane, 2008)

Table 1. (Continued)*Timeline of Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i*

1848	Māhele, transition of communal land tenure system to private ownership, establishing the basis for foreign ownership of land in Hawai‘i (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992; Fujikane, 2008; Warner, 1999)
1850 – early 1900s	White sugar plantation owners recruited large numbers of Chinese and Japanese laborers, who overwhelmed the Native Hawaiian population while competing for land and resources (Fujikane, 2008; Trask, 1991)
1893	U.S. military overthrow of Hawaiian government (Fujikane, 2008; Warner, 2001)
1896	Republic of Hawai‘i, a governing body led by U.S. businessmen, banned Hawaiian language in public schools (Warner, 1999)
1898	United States annexed Hawai‘i as a territorial colony (Fujikane, 2008)
1906	First Filipino laborers arrive (Fujikane, 2008)
1939-1945	World War II was a “watershed era” of United States military’s control and use of Hawai‘i and other Pacific islands (Balutski & Wright, 2016)
through 1954	White Republican business owners dominated economic and political spheres in Hawai‘i (Fujikane, 2008)
1954	“Democratic Revolution,” new generation of Japanese settlers gained political power, creating hierarchy of White and East Asian settlers over Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and other ethnic groups (Fujikane, 2008; Saranillio, 2010)
from 1950s	White, Japanese American, and Chinese American residents of Hawai‘i continued to dominate in terms of political representation, economic status, and educational attainment, in contrast to Kānaka Maoli, Filipino Americans, Southeast Asians, Polynesians, and Micronesians (Fujikane, 2008; Okamura, 2008)

Table 1. (Continued)*Timeline of Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i*

1970s	Kānaka movements press for change, including in education (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013)
1978	Delegates to 1978 state constitutional convention included provisions for a Hawaiian education program with language, culture, and history in public schools; affirmation of Hawaiian as an official language of Hawai‘i (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013)
1983	Families and educators founded ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, ‘ohana-based Hawaiian-language immersion education in independent preschools (Warner, 2001)
1986	Ban on instruction in Hawaiian language in public schools overturned, allowing for publicly funded Hawaiian-language immersion schools (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013; Warner, 2001)
1999	Founding of Hālau Kū Māna Hawaiian-focused charter school (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013)
2000	Rice v. Cayetano U.S. Supreme Court decision opened all Native Hawaiian entitlements to legal assault (Saranillio, 2008)
2009	Hawai‘i governor Cayetano (1994-2002), first Filipino American governor of a U.S. state, says in his memoir that he has lived long enough in Hawai‘i to “feel Hawaiian,” and that Hawaiian claims to self determination are “an impossible dream” (Saranillio, 2013, p. 280)

With regards to Asian settler colonialism and its impact on education, it is worth elaborating on a few things from the timeline. The 1954 Democratic Revolution has been seen as a moment when “liberal multiculturalism displaced a white racial dictatorship,” but also as a second layer of oppression where Native Hawaiians were now subordinated to the White elite and “a newly assertive Asian majority” (Bell, 1984, as cited in Saranillio, 2010). In fact, scholars

of settler colonialism have documented examples of such ascendancy coming at the cost of Native Hawaiian rights. Trask (1991) points out how “Asian success proves to be but the latest elaboration of foreign hegemony,” part of a second conquest that continued to perpetuate the subordination of Native Hawaiians in terms of health, access to land, education, and economic wellbeing (Trask, 1991, p. 47).

For example, Japanese Americans running as Democrats in 1954 gained popular support by promising land reforms that would benefit the working class, but their policies turned out to benefit White and Asian settlers, not Native Hawaiians (Fujikane, 2008). While Japanese Americans constituted a majority of the politically and economically dominant group in the “Asian success” of the second half of the twentieth century, the words and actions of former Hawai‘i governor Benjamin J. Cayetano (1994-2002), celebrated as the first Filipino American governor of a U.S. state, also provided another example of Native Hawaiian interests being subjugated to those of settlers (Saranillio, 2013). Cayetano asserted that he had lived long enough in Hawai‘i to feel Hawaiian, which obscured the specific genealogical and geographical connections Native Hawaiians have to place (Saranillio, 2013).

The ascendancy of many East Asians in Hawai‘i to the economic and political elite fed into a popular myth of Hawai‘i as a multicultural paradise based on “equality, harmony, and openness,” but Okamura argues that this myth actually perpetuated ethnic inequalities by obscuring the gaps in power and status between different ethnic groups (Okamura, 2008) and the longstanding history of genocide and racism towards Native Hawaiians (Balutski & Wright, 2016). Through the discourses of immigrant and local identity formation, and the “Americanization” movement, Asian settlers supported the authority of the U.S. settler state and

its subjugation of Native Hawaiian peoples (Fujikane, 2008). The myth of multicultural Hawai‘i obscured the specific oppressions experienced by Native Hawaiian peoples by relegating them to one of many ethnic groups in a multicultural state, rather than seeing them as Indigenous peoples with specific rights and genealogical connections to the land (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Fujikane, 2008; Kotani, 1985; Saranillio, 2008). Ultimately, the discourses around the empowerment of Asian groups in Hawai‘i served to reinforce White supremacist colonial ideologies against Native Hawaiians.

Social Locations in Asian Settler Colonialism

Critiques of Asian settler colonialism suggest the importance of looking at complex social locations instead of traditional identity categories or binaries like colonized versus colonizer, White versus non-White, or Native versus settler. Ethnic categories such as “Asian,” “Pacific Islander,” or combinations thereof obscured particular histories and experiences unique to a group of people. An examination of such complexities also led to a critical examination of how Asian identity formation as Americans or “locals,” within the narrative of multicultural progress in a nation of immigrants, obscured the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Categories of Erasure

In writing about decolonizing educational research, Patel (2016) pushed researchers to reject the Western impulse of categorization in building knowledge, and look instead to individual “coordinates of social, physical, and ethical locations,” paying attention to “ongoing responsibilities and relations among peoples, places, and practices” (Patel, 2016, p. 5, p. 57). According to Patel, each person’s assemblage of social locations consists of “unfixed yet durable histories and trajectories” (p. 5) that are rooted in how settler colonialism has framed and categorized people, knowledge, and land (p. 57). A recognition of these assemblages can serve as a foundation for a deeper understanding of the complexities of Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i, beyond identity categories like race or ethnicity.

The lumping in of Native Hawaiians with categories such as “Asian,” “Pacific Islander” or “local” obscured Indigenous experiences and voices, and denied their rights and status (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Hall, 2009; Kauanui, 2005; Saranillio, 2013). Such practices ignored the definition of Indigeneity, which include historical and genealogical connections to specific places, original or prior occupancy of land, and a dynamic identity distinct from race, ethnicity, and nationality (Kauanui, 2016). This relegation of Native Hawaiians as simply one of many ethnic groups in Hawai‘i was the basis of legal cases (Rice v. Cayetano, Arakaki et al. v. the State of Hawai‘i, Arakaki et al. v. Lingle) against entitlements and compensatory programs for Native Hawaiians, where White and Asian settlers used civil rights arguments against “preference” to Native Hawaiians (Fujikane, 2008; Saranillio, 2008). This reductive racialization of Native Hawaiians and a focus on civil rights serves the political purpose of obscuring

Indigeneity and the long history of the Native Hawaiian struggle for self-determination (Fujikane, 2008).

Saranillio used articulation theory to contextualize different groups within their particular and shared complexities in Hawaiian history, arguing that while different groups in Hawai‘i may share experiences of oppression under White supremacy, each group had its unique historical contexts that should not be flattened, assumed to be in solidarity, nor assumed to be in opposition (Saranillio, 2013, p. 282). For example, Filipino Americans are Asian but experienced racism from other ethnic groups in Hawai‘i, faced persistent negative stereotypes, and did not uniformly share the cultural, political, or socioeconomic dominance that Japanese Americans or Chinese Americans attained in Hawai‘i (Okamura, 2008). Also, the historical context of Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i is incomplete without consideration of U.S., Spanish, British, and Japanese imperialism in Asia, which created challenging political and economic circumstances in China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. Even as all these countries were threatened by imperialism, there were differences in their experiences with war and colonization. When Filipino workers arrived in Hawai‘i in 1906, they were coming from a colonized homeland to another colonized state, after their country had struggled with Spanish colonialism, revolution, American occupation, and devastating losses in the Philippine-American War (Fujikane, 2008).

In Hawai‘i, the print media’s negative representations of Filipino men as violent and cruel may have been a factor in the disproportionately high numbers of Filipino men executed by the state in the first half of the 20th century (Okamura, 2008). Negative stereotypes about Filipinos, sometimes manifesting in ethnic humor, served as obstacles to Filipinos asserting their own cultural identity and fortifying their social status (Okamura, 2008). Late 1990s and early

2000s model minority narratives of Filipino Americans overcoming hardships through sacrifice and hard work were also problematic, in that they failed to examine the discrimination that Filipino Americans faced in employment and education (Okamura, 2008).

On the educational front, Filipino American students are the second largest ethnic group (22%) in the state's inequitably funded public school system (Halagao, 2016), while the socioeconomically privileged ethnic groups (White, Japanese American, Chinese American) dominated in private school enrollment (Okamura, 2008). Challenges for Filipino students in Hawai'i public schools have historically been overlooked relative to Native Hawaiian students (26%) and more recent immigrants such as Marshallese, Chuukeese, and other Micronesians (Halagao, 2016). For example, while graduation (89%) and college attendance rates (58%) for Filipinos are above the state average, Filipino students only constituted 9% of enrollment at University of Hawai'i at Manoa, the state university system's flagship campus (Libarios and Bachini, 2016, as cited in Halagao, 2016). Such challenges in educational opportunities shaped economic mobility and professional opportunities for Filipino Americans in Hawai'i, as shown in census data where Filipino families with children have the second lowest mean income among major ethnic groups in Hawai'i (Halagao, 2016), and disproportionate numbers of Filipino Americans in the low wage service sectors (Okamura, 2008).

Settler Identity Formation

The scholarship in Asian settler colonialism considers if and how progress for Asian settlers in Hawai'i has served to reinforce existing colonial systems, displace Native Hawaiians, and undermine Native Hawaiian struggles for self-determination (Labrador, 2014). Saranillio (2013) argues that injustices towards Native populations are ideologically invisible to settlers,

who often stand to benefit from colonizing discourses. The representation of Hawai‘i as a multicultural paradise, of settlers as “locals,” of the United States as a nation of immigrants, and of Asian settlers earning their right to be here by their hard work and sacrifice are all part of the discursive regime of settler colonialism.

Scholars in Asian settler colonialism have pointed out how the term “local” in the context of Hawai‘i obscured the genealogical connections to land that distinguish Native Hawaiians from settlers while allowing settlers to claim Hawaiian identity. Yamamoto (1979) surveyed the literature around “local” identity in Hawai‘i and defined it as “a composite of ethnic cultures, emerging in reaction to domination by Western institutions and culture, composed of people of Hawaii with community value-orientations” (Yamamoto, 1979, p. 105). Even though the term “local” was used to unite non-White people in opposition to haole supremacy, or used against categorization as “haole,” it conflated settlers and Indigenous peoples and assumed that the interests of Indigenous people aligned with non-White groups (Kosasa, K., 2008; Kosasa & Yoshinaga, 2008; Saranillio, 2013; Trask, 2008).. The term “local” fused “immigrant” and “settler” in the process of portraying the settler state of Hawai‘i as part of a “multicultural nation” of immigrants (Trask, 2008). “Local” became an ethnically-inclusive category for settlers that erased the distinction between Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians (Fujikane, 2008).

In the American story of nationhood, Hawai‘i is cast as part of the U.S.’s unique success story as a “nation of immigrants,” where hard work and perserverance helped Asian laborers triumph over exploitative working conditions and anti-Asian racism (Trask, 2008). Their industrious, deserving children made educational gains, which then led them to economic success and political power (Trask, 2008). However, following the ascendancy of many Asians

(largely East Asians) to political power in Hawai‘i in 1954, most Native Hawaiians continued to be subjugated in the realms of education, employment opportunities, landlessness, and health (Trask, 2008). In fact, Trask argues that the attainment of full American citizenship for Asians in Hawai‘i actually harmed Native Hawaiian claims to self-determination through the assertion of a “local” identity while denying any connection between Asian ascendancy and the oppressive structures of colonialism (Trask, 2008). In other words, Asian settlers, who wanted to counter the idea of themselves as perpetual foreign “sojourners,” embraced the term “settler” without considering the implications for Native Hawaiians (Saranillio, 2013). As a result, the economic and political dominance of Asian settlers is seen as earned and “deserved,” which also implies that Native Hawaiians did not deserve to be in power and that the presence of Asian settlers in Hawai‘i was unproblematic (Trask, 1991, 2008). The use of the term “local” for Asian settlers also avoids the unequal distribution of power between Asian settlers and Hawaiians, while obscuring the fact that Indigenous concerns over sovereignty, nationhood, and land affect Native Hawaiians in ways that are different from how they might affect Asian settlers (Saranillio, 2013).

Unsettling Binaries

Despite the pervasive idea that power relationships are binary (either oppressor or oppressed), Asian settler colonialism actually highlighted the relational nature of oppression (Saranillio, 2013). In addressing the critiques of Asian settler colonialism, Labrador suggested that collective struggles for liberation are actually undermined by a native-settler binary, and asked if a native-settler-immigrant tripartite framework might work better. Some critiques of Asian settler colonialism acknowledge that Asians are settlers, but deny that Asians had the

power to colonize or oppress Native Hawaiian peoples as they themselves were also oppressed by the White oligarchy of plantation-era Hawai‘i (Labrador, 2013, 2015).

For framing this study in the context of Asian settler colonialism, I return to Patel’s framework of assemblages of social locations which consist of “unfixed yet durable histories and trajectories” (Patel, 2016, p. 5) that are rooted in how settler colonialism has framed and categorized people, knowledge, and land (p. 57). These types of colonial categorizations ignore history and context, and can lead to assumptions about the goals and experiences of different groups within a broad umbrella category like Asian. This in turn would impede the possibility of solidarity among different groups against colonial structures (Saranillio, 2013).

Furthermore, attending to the different histories and trajectories means recognizing Indigenous claims to land and nation, which are different from settler claims. For this study, I recognize that Native Hawaiians as Indigenous peoples have a critical, genealogical relationship to Hawai‘i that is fundamentally different from the relationships settlers have to Hawai‘i, regardless of how long the settlers have been here. Wright and Balutski (2016) wrote about context-specific interpretations of colonialism and occupation in ‘ŌiwiCrit perspectives, which have “very real sociocultural and sociopolitical impacts” on Native Hawaiian people.

For my research inquiry, this also means acknowledging the many struggles and oppressions faced by Asians coming to Hawai‘i, while also recognizing that various Asian groups have experienced, and continue to experience, complex differences in their settler trajectories due to inequitable systems and possible intra-settler discrimination within the structures of settler colonialism. I also acknowledge that while colonization and immigration are not the same thing, the presence of large numbers of Asians in Hawai‘i would not have been

possible without U.S. settler colonial and oligarchic structures, and that being a settler “is inextricable from the processes of occupation and colonization” (Fujikane, 2008, p. 7).

Education as a Response to Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i

All scholarly endeavors taking place in Western educational institutions, including decolonizing endeavors, are shaped by coloniality (Patel, 2016), including the vast amount of literature on SJE (Tuck & Yang, 2016). Academic research and teaching also have long histories of reinforcing colonial interests (Smith, 2021). Yet there is reason to believe that education is one of many realms in which collective, transformative responses to settler colonialism can take place. This means that non-Native researchers, educators, and activists can join broader, global struggles against various forms of oppression rooted in colonialism, becoming answerable to Indigenous revitalization and survivance despite the fact that their training and knowledge have been shaped by coloniality (Patel, 2016; Sailiata, 2015). While Asian settlers may have aligned or identified with the interests of the settler state, it is also possible for Asian settlers to choose to act against such influences, to “use settler colonialism against itself,” and to be accountable to Indigenous goals of decolonization (Saranillio, 2013, p. 282).

In this next section, I start by exploring the different conceptions of kuleana because it is an important idea in the discussions that follow. With a focus on land, I look at examples of settler alliances across different social locations that have been shaped by the lessons of Asian settler colonialism. Then, I explore the implications of Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i with regards to education. Drawing on the concept of kuleana, I examine the roles and responsibilities of settler educators, and how this relates to social justice teaching in Hawai‘i.

Conceptions of Kuleana

Kuleana consists of rights, responsibilities, and authority, defined by historical contexts and present-day obligations (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Warner, 1999). In critical Indigenous studies, the politics of land and genealogy are essential to ‘Ōiwi conceptions of kuleana (Aikau et al., 2016). The concept of mo‘okū‘auhau, one’s connections to people, places, and spaces, defines “diverse pathways and relationships” in different contexts, but more importantly, is also the basis for kuleana or responsibility/burden/privilege to care for specific places one is connected to by familial bonds (Balutski & Wright, 2016, pp. 93, 102).

Going beyond the definition of “rights, responsibilities, and authority,” Aikau et al. argue that kuleana includes ancestry and place. In other words, the term “kuleana” means more than care and use of land resources, but also names the relationship of people to land, the relationship being the basis for the obligations and privileges around that land (Aikau et al., 2016). As such, this conception of kuleana included genealogy, residence over time (which supported learning, observation, and interaction with the land), demonstration of stewardship of natural and social resources, and affirmation from the spiritual and human communities (Aikau et al., 2016). While the definition of “kuleana” may have shifted in the 19th century to reflect settler definitions of individualistic, private land ownership, land remains central to conceptions of the word (Aikau et al., 2016). As such, the concept of kuleana is also essential to the revitalization of Indigenous ways of relating to land, and thus, essential to the “unmaking of settler colonialism” (Aikau et al., 2016).

There is a lot at stake in terms of Native Hawaiians exercising their kuleana. Warner (1999) argues that the perpetuation of Hawaiian language is a matter of survival and existence

for Hawaiian peoples, as language is the “medium through which people transmit culture and history” (p. 77). When the 19th century U.S. settler state embarked on “Americanization” of immigrants, passing laws for “English only instruction” in schools, the impacts of language loss were far more profound for Native Hawaiians. While Asian settlers have an ancestral homeland where people continue to speak their heritage language and practice their culture,

when indigenous peoples lose their language and culture, there is no other group of people who maintain that language and culture in their homeland. The loss of indigenous language is terminal: language death. (p. 72)

Furthermore, myths about the superiority of Western culture and English language were imposed on Native Hawaiians in ways that undermined their identities:

The myth of cultural superiority ... and assimilation ... have largely redefined Hawaiian culture, values, histories in their language as they [nonindigenous people] have seen fit.

In essence, they have destroyed and redefined native people’s very identities. (p. 72)

Thus, Warner (1999) asserts that Hawaiians have the kuleana (rights, responsibilities, and authority) “to determine, first, if they want the help of the non-Hawaiians and, second, what should constitute that help” (p. 80). In other words, when non-Native peoples want to be allies to Indigenous people, their roles must be determined by the Indigenous people themselves, based on Indigenous definitions and present-day material needs, not to be tokenized, appropriated, silenced, or defined by the desires of non-Native peoples (Warner, 1999).

As stated earlier, the legal concept of civil rights has been used to undermine programs that redress Hawaiian language and cultural loss, based on the argument that Hawaiians are just another racial or ethnic group (Kaomea, 2009b):

Native Hawaiians have made a self-determined effort to develop schools of our own, in which Hawaiian teachers, Hawaiian administrators and Hawaiian-focused curricula predominate ... as these Hawaiian education programmes are gaining popularity with Native Hawaiian students, they are also becoming popular with non-Hawaiians who, for a variety of reasons, are seeking equal access to Hawaiian education programmes and, in some instances, they are filing lawsuits to defend what they believe to be their civil right to participate in such programmes. (Watson, 2006, Kaomea, 2009b, as quoted in Kaomea 2009a, p. 81).

Kaomea (2009a) reflects on personal observations and participation in such a program, where the presence of non-Hawaiian participants was disruptive and detrimental to the program due to different learning styles and attitudes:

I noticed that English began to dominate the parents', the children's, and eventually the kumu's interactions, as he politely reverted to English throughout his lessons to respond to Katie's mother's [a non-Hawaiian participant] many questions about tenses, vocabulary or grammatical structures. (p.85)

Kaomea (2009a) compares Hawaiian ways of learning, where "questions were encouraged, but only after first engaging in the other steps of learning: observing, listening, reflecting and practicing," with Western methods of inquiry, which "encourage questioning as the primary vehicle for learning" (p. 85).

The idea that non-Kānaka participants have a right of access to such programs falls short of the Hawaiian notion of kuleana, in which rights are earned based on fulfilling responsibilities (Kaomea, 2009a). The focus on rights without responsibility inevitably affected the programs

meant for furthering Hawaiian survivance. To avoid such situations, Kaomea encouraged allies and non-Native participants to consider the histories of past struggles with coloniality, the cultural contexts around learning styles, and to reflect deeply on their appropriate roles (Kaomea, 2009a).

Kuleana also reinforced the notion that Native Hawaiian experiences under coloniality are not the same as those of settlers. Aikau et al. (2016) drew on kuleana to guide Native and settler students in an understanding of individual responsibility that is “fluid and relative, while also holding each individual accountable to communities, nations, and ancestors.” Each person has kuleana based on different social, genealogical, and spatial locations (Aikau et al., 2016). Fujikane and Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (Fujikane, 2021) discussed a possible term “settler aloha ‘aina” for those who exercise settler kuleana while keeping in mind their settler privileges, actively supporting Native Hawaiian efforts to perpetuate their connections to ancestral land, and working to materialize decolonization itself (p. 14). This definition also resonates with Patel’s (2016) encouragement to be mindful of one’s assemblage of social locations and responsibilities to people, places, land, and collective well-being in decolonizing efforts. In enacting relational conceptions of kuleana, critical Indigenous scholars see the possibility of shifting the structures of settler colonialism. In the next section, I look at some examples of Asian settler scholars enacting their kuleana towards land and Native rights to self-determination.

Resisting Colonial Conceptions of Land

Land is central to settler colonialism, and conceptions of land can either reinforce colonial ideas or undermine them. This section describes examples of settler allies who demonstrated reflexivity about their settler status, resisted colonial narratives around land by

collaborating with Native populations, or enacted their roles and responsibilities in ways that supported Hawaiian claims to self-determination.

The Hawaiian notion of ‘*aina* is reciprocal, for ‘*aina* means “that which feeds,” and the land feeds the people who take care of it (Silva, 2017; Vaughan, 2018). Such caretaking is an important part of the *kuleana* towards ‘*aina*, where *kuleana* includes use, cultivation, authority, obligation, interdependence, sustenance, and abundance (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013; Vaughan, 2018). Connection to land is an essential part of Indigeneity, whereas the settler experience is defined by disconnection and discontinuity (Silva, 2017). The conception of settlers as deserving immigrant workers who developed Hawai‘i’s “uncultivated” land into productive and profitable spaces erased Indigenous notions of land as reciprocal and interconnected.

Fujikane (2016) described collaborative efforts to prevent development in Lualualei, where she engaged with *kūpuna* and cultural practitioners in collaborative, reflexive, reciprocal alliances, in line with the literary, genealogical, and educational traditions of the community. Drawing on the Indigenous methodology of cartography, one that embodied genealogical interconnectedness between people and place, activists resisted the settler/capitalist cartographical impulse to map Lualualei for development and sale. Acknowledging her position as both Japanese settler and supporter of the Hawaiian independence movement, Fujikane (2016, 2021) framed her work as simultaneously resisting the U.S. occupying/settler state, all forms of oppression mobilized by the state, capitalist conceptions of land that are responsible for climate change, while supporting efforts towards a future that is independent of the U.S. state.

Saranillio (2013) also wrote about ways to resist settler colonial narratives about land and resources. He suggested considering a pre-settler state of interconnectedness, a less

anthropocentric way of seeing land and resources, rather than the settler view of it being a “wasteland of non-achievement” (Saranillio, 2013, p. 290). Using a Marxist framework, Saranillio critiqued the conception of Asian settlers as more deserving of the resources and land because they have worked hard to “develop” it, whereas Native Hawaiians had not made the “seemingly uncultivated” land a profitable, productive place (Saranillio, 2013, p. 289). The Marxist idea of primitive accumulation also shows the necessity of constructing two types of people: diligent/frugal/intelligent versus lazy/riotous, fitting in well with colonial narratives of Native peoples being undeserving of managing their own societies, needing civilization from religion and Western education, and deserving of having their land and resources taken away from them (Saranillio, 2013). In rejecting such conceptions of land where its economic development makes someone “deserving,” settlers can resist structures of coloniality.

Implications for Education in Hawai‘i

Smith (2021) laid out a foundation for looking at the ways in which the production of knowledge, the practice of research, and the application of theory have been inextricably connected to colonial interests, land theft, and tangible harm to Indigenous populations. Saranillio’s definition of settler colonialism also includes the fact that settlers are “discursively constituted as superior and thus more deserving over these contested lands and resources” (Saranillio, 2015). The work of educators is implicated in knowledge validation, production, and transmission, so it stands to reason that education is also implicated in discourses that justified the elimination of Native peoples. Settler control over the medium of instruction in public schools, including the banning of Hawaiian language in schools, the punishment of children using Hawaiian in schools, and the later policy of separate English-only schools all reinforced

the erasure of Native language and culture in material and discursive ways (Bayer, 2009; Warner, 1999). Patel (2016) examined education research and the established tradition of pathologizing marginalized groups by scrutinizing deficits rather than successes. This type of research had negative consequences on marginalized students in schools, where the assumptions about their deficiencies obscured the cultural assets students already had. The education of marginalized students from non-dominant cultures was often based on a banking model of education so as to meet Western-centric standards of success (Yosso, 2005). Ignoring the cultural and linguistic gifts students brought to the classrooms, one-size-fits-all approaches failed to affirm and honor Indigenous and other minority children (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2017). When faced with curricula that replicates “White U.S. culture” in gatekeeping institutions like schools and universities, it is no wonder that many Native Hawaiian students did not thrive within the standards of imposed colonial structures (Warner, 1999).

Rather than a monolithic or visible thing, colonial discourse is rhizomatic and heteroglossic, as Kaomea demonstrated in her analysis of Hawaiian studies curriculum and instruction in elementary schools (Kaomea, 2005). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, as cited in Kaomea, 2005), Kaomea argues that colonial discourse spreads in multiple directions, from multiple points, in dynamic, intersecting ways. In her classroom observations, Kaomea heard the denigrating words and ideas of colonizers towards Native Hawaiian peoples repeated through voices of multiple generations, in textbooks and classrooms, from the mouths of teachers and students (Kaomea, 2005). These words seemed to serve as justification for the missionary presence, language banning, cultural suppression, and denial of Hawaiian self-determination (Kaomea, 2005).

Kaomea attributed this type of curriculum partly to the fact that teachers and school leaders of East Asian descent vastly outnumbered Native Hawaiian teachers in Hawai‘i (Kaomea, 2005). Data from 2005 showed that the largest percentages of both teachers and administrators in the Hawai‘i Department of Education are Japanese, followed by White (Fujikane, 2008). Since educators have influence over how Asian settler histories are taught and interpreted in schools, the dominance of East Asian educators reinforced the ethnic stratification in education as well as cultural and historical understandings of settler histories (Fujikane, 2016; Saranillio, 2015). After all, occupation of a land relies in part on how that occupation is represented in words and stories (Saranillio, 2015). Kaomea’s observations of such discourse in Hawai‘i public school classrooms reinforces the idea that despite the almost ubiquitous discourse around diversity, multiculturalism, equity, and inclusion in education, the structures of settler colonialism continue to erase and dehumanize Indigenous peoples in ways that have ongoing and material consequences through the present day (Patel, 2016, p. xv). Such consequences include poor outcomes in health, low representation in Hawai‘i state government, high incarceration rates, high percentages of houselessness, fewer educational opportunities, low wages, and fewer job opportunities (Okamura, 2008; Trask, 2008; Warner, 1999).

This chapter provided an overview of the main ideas and concerns of settler colonialism with a focus on Asian settler colonialism and the resulting inequities in Hawai‘i that are due to historical contexts but also embedded in ongoing structures. This awareness of settler colonialism and the particular histories of Hawai‘i shed light on how broad definitions of SJE may not address the ongoing inequities in a settler state. Thus, the next chapter explores broader contexts around SJE definitions, teacher experiences around SJE, and some place-based, situated

educational responses to ongoing settler colonialism in Hawai‘i, in the context of the settler colonial histories and contexts described above. These explorations of existing research will then serve as a backdrop for where this study enters the conversation as it addresses the two research questions: what factors shaped K-12 educators’ orientations towards SJE and how they define and conceptualize SJE in their current work as educators. Subsequent chapters will provide details about the methodology and study design, the findings, and the significance of these findings for research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINING, EXPERIENCING, AND CONTEXTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

This study examines the experiences of a diverse group of K-12 educators in Hawai‘i, exploring in detail the factors that shaped their orientation towards social justice education (SJE), and their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE in their current work as educators. To contextualize these two research questions in the existing research literature, I explore three areas in this chapter:

1. How do educators define and conceptualize SJE?
2. What do we know about teacher conscientization towards SJE?
3. What are educational responses to settler colonialism in Hawai‘i?

In other words, I first explore the literature to see how researchers and educators have defined and conceptualized SJE, and what major ideas or challenges exist in the conversations around SJE definitions. Second, in order for this study to make practical connections to SJE teacher development, I explore existing literature around how educators developed critical consciousness or orientation towards social justice in their teaching. Finally, keeping in mind the theoretical framework of settler colonialism, I look at existing literature around how education in Hawai‘i has responded to settler colonial contexts. The literature in these three areas frame how this particular study enters and engages with the broader conversations.

Defining Social Justice Education

The concept of social justice became prominent in United States scholarship on teacher education starting in the 1990s (Belknap, 2020; Pugach et al., 2019), though scholars who trace the various philosophies and theories that have shaped SJE (Dover, 2013) include the early 20th

century thinking of John Dewey on progressive education and its role in democracy (Dewey, 1916); critical or problem-posing pedagogies (Freire, 1970); multicultural education that grew out of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Banks, 1995; Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016; Nieto, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2018); culturally relevant, responsive, or sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995b); and education about social justice which specifically focuses on identity, justice, oppression, and intersectionality (Adams et al., 1997; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009). Sometimes SJE seems like a loose umbrella term that includes or overlaps with “multicultural education” (Cho, 2017; Menna et al., 2022; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009), “critical multiculturalism” (May & Sleeter, 2010), “teaching for social justice” (Cho, 2017; Dover, 2013, 2016), “critical pedagogy” (Freire, 1970), “anti-oppressive education” (Adams et al., 2018; Kumashiro, 2015; Swalwell & Spikes, 2021), “anti-bias education” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2016), “identity-conscious education” (Talusán, 2022), or “education for social justice” (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011). In fact, Cochran-Smith (2010) says that the term “social justice” has been used for any aspect of teacher education that touches on equity issues or multicultural education. It is often a “catch-all” term where various dimensions are lumped together (Menna et al., 2022; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009).

Finding clear, consistent definitions of SJE in the literature is challenging precisely because the term often encompassed a wide range of justice-related concerns in education. In many cases, the literature talked about SJE without defining it (Tuck & Yang, 2018). One definition from Nieto and Bode (2018) was about social justice on a societal level:

a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity. On a societal scale, this means affording each person the

real - not simply a stated or codified - opportunity to achieve to her or his potential and full participation in a democratic society by giving each person access to the goods, services and cultural capital of a society, while also affirming the culture and talents of each individual and the group or groups with which she or he identifies. (p. 8)

The vast array of research that falls under the umbrella of SJE demonstrated a response to historical and systemic inequities, demographic changes, social movements, and shifts in geopolitics, politics, and the economy (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Nieto, 2000). Some scholars used broader, philosophical concepts of justice as a foundation for SJE definitions. For example, scholars (Belknap, 2020; Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010) have looked at Fraser's three axes of economic justice, cultural justice, and political justice, all three of which must be met for true parity of participation (Dahl et al., 2004; Fraser, 1995, 2010). Fraser also wrote about the necessity of equitable political representation for all voices, and a systems understanding that can help justice-oriented people disrupt and dismantle systems rather than just mitigate harm (Dahl et al., 2004; Fraser, 1995). Chubbuck and Zembylas (2016) also explored the theory of social connection and responsibility, highlighting the role of individuals within unjust structures, defining responsibility as collective and relational (Young, 2011). Since people are all part of a social collective, "all individuals contribute by their actions to structural injustice" and have a responsibility to act against such structures (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016, p. 476).

Another common critique of the literature on SJE is that while there may be a shared concern with fairness, change, and action, there are few specific or consistent conceptualizations of what teachers or aspiring teachers actually experience in terms of SJE curricula, pedagogy, programming, or practices (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Kelly-Jackson,

2015; Roegman et al., 2021; Spitzman & Balconi, 2019). This type of vagueness can lead to potentially superficial, isolated, or additive endeavors (Banks, 1989) to integrate social justice in education without addressing oppressive systems and structures (Zeichner & McDonald, 2009). Without clear definitions and conceptualizations, teachers who are prepared in social justice-oriented programs may enter the profession to find conflicting definitions of SJE in practice (Roegman et al., 2021), or find themselves unable to integrate social justice into the classroom (Agarwal, 2011; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009). The lack of a clear definition also puts scholars in the position of having to clarify and defend SJE against misconceptions, like the idea that education should be politically neutral, or that social justice learning dilutes or takes away from traditional core curriculum (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

While some have argued that SJE scholarship is not adequately grounded in theories of justice (Belknap, 2020; Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009), there is also evidence of rich theoretical grounding in Bell's (2023) detailed theory of oppression in her conceptualization of social justice. In Bell's definition, SJE is a response to oppression, which is pervasive, restrictive, hierarchical, complex, and situated in historical and social contexts. Bell defines SJE as education that analyzes "multiple forms of oppression and their intersections" in a pedagogy that gives students tools to examine "how oppression operates both in the social system and in the personal lives of individuals from diverse communities" (Bell, 2023, p. 4). In other words, SJE serves to:

enable individuals to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand the structural features of oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems. Social justice education aims to help participants develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine

issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society. It also aims to connect analysis to action - to help participants develop a sense of urgency and commitment, as well as skills and tools, for working with others to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities of which they are a part (Bell, 2023, p. 4).

While scholars did not suggest that teachers individually take on all forms of injustice in implementing SJE, they emphasized how important it was for all teachers to see a broad picture of injustice in complex, interlocking ways: economic, cultural, and political, so as to avoid perpetuating the injustices in education, and to address inequities where they can (Belknap, 2020; Bondy et al., 2017).

According to Tuck and Yang (2018), education researchers and scholars who employ the term “social justice” share a focus:

... for those of us in education who reject positivist and developmental paradigms, social justice has been a way to signal to ourselves and to one another this epistemological and political difference. Social justice is a way to mark a distinction from the origins and habits of almost all disciplines which emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries and are rooted in colonialism and white supremacy. Social justice education is a way to refer to all research and practice within the domains of education which are a departure from behavioral or cognitive or developmental approaches. (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 4)

Tuck and Yang have suggested that educators need not agree on a single definition of social justice, because the activities of SJE, activism, and community organizing for different positionalities are incommensurable with each other (Tuck & Yang, 2018). In fact, they define

social justice broadly in terms of “human and civil rights based social justice projects,” but they also point out that the concept of “social justice” itself was a product of the modern colonial era (Tuck & Yang, 2016). Thus, they object to SJE discourses subsuming “decolonizing” or “decolonization” under the broad SJE umbrella since the goals are different (Tuck & Yang, 2012). They suggest that some concerns, like Indigenous resurgence, “precede and exceed injustice and, by the same token, justice.” Priorities such as sovereignty, self-determination, decolonization, and futurisms have “specific material concerns that refuse the abstraction of justice and its limits in the nation-state” (Tuck & Yang, 2016, p. 9). These assertions suggest that SJE may not be commensurable with efforts to right the wrongs of settler colonialism, which is something I return to later in this chapter, and later in this study.

Teacher Definitions and Conscientization Towards SJE

Moving from broader issues in the scholarship around SJE definitions, this section examines more specifically teacher preparation and conscientization experiences towards SJE. Much of the SJE scholarship around this topic focuses on teacher preparation and teacher educators, suggesting that teachers have vital roles to play in the attainment of justice in education, and that many scholars are concerned with the preparation of teachers for equitable teaching of diverse students (Agarwal, 2011; Agarwal et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Goodwin & Darity, 2019; Kelly-Jackson, 2015; Menna et al., 2022; Pugach et al., 2019; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021; Roegman et al., 2021). Some scholarship focused on the challenges of implementing SJE (Agarwal, 2011; Agarwal et al., 2010), while others examined how teacher preparation can have “priorities, and silences” around social justice issues, resulting in inconsistent knowledge and strategies (Goodwin & Darity, 2019, p. 73).

In her discussion of a theory for social justice teacher education, Cochran-Smith (2010) said that teacher preparation for social justice teaching should be “a coherent and intellectual approach” that goes beyond a set of methods and activities; it should encompass a complex set of skills for enhancing student learning and life chances that include:

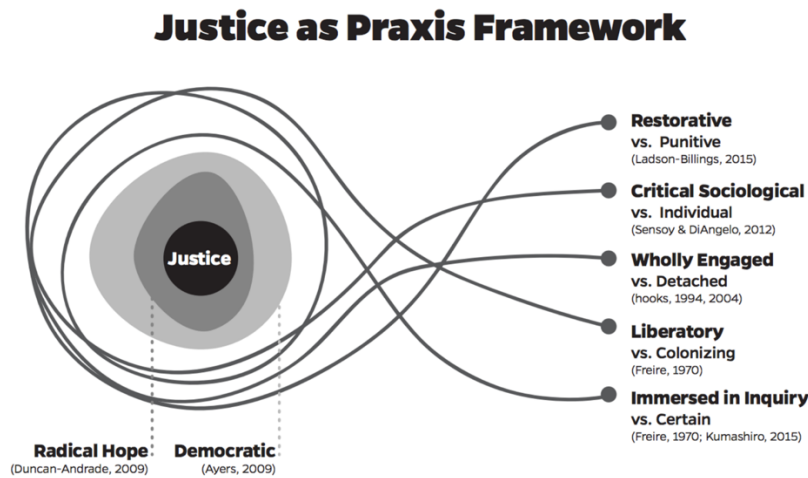
how teachers think about their work and interpret what is going on in schools and classrooms; how they understand competing agendas, pose questions, and make decisions; how they form relationships with students; and how they work with colleagues, families, communities, and social groups (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 454).

In other words, teaching practices must involve critical awareness around historical, social, and political contexts that shape schooling, a sense of relationality, and the purpose of making things better for students in school and beyond. In addition, teachers’ sociopolitical awareness and commitment to social justice are vital when addressing the needs of less privileged, minoritized students (Freire, 2021).

Bondy et al. (2017) built on Cochran-Smith’s theory of practice through a framework of Justice as Praxis, which draws on the Freirean idea of praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to change it” (Freire, 1970, p. 51). Instead of prescribing a singular definition of justice for educators, Bondy et al. instead described seven contours of justice that show what justice-oriented teacher education looks like. The following figure illustrates the seven contours of the Justice as Praxis framework.

Figure 1.

Bondy, Beck, Schroeder, & Curcio (2017) Justice as Praxis Framework



The core of the framework is justice, surrounded by radical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) and democracy. Duncan-Andrade’s notion of radical hope is hope despite overwhelming odds, because “there is no other choice” (2009, p. 191). This radical hope is connected to a deep sense of responsibility for the communal well-being of all people, and for educators, it represents a profound determination to educate students so that they can transform their own lives and communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

Bondy et al. also assert that justice must be democratic, and thus, can be defined in different ways by different people. True ideas of justice must be open to “continual discussion and dissent,” resting on the collective power of people to work democratically towards solving problems (Bondy et al., 2017, p. 6). Next, the critical sociological dimension of the framework is a reminder that justice is embedded in systems with historical and sociocultural roots. The restorative dimension suggests that educators challenge injustice in ways that promote healing for all, including those who have been oppressed as well as those who have been complicit in

injustice. The wholly engaged dimension recognizes the impact of injustice on the body, mind, and spirit, and advocate an integrated approach to examining injustices on a person's full being. The liberatory dimension reminds educators to ask if their actions are promoting freedom and self-determination without further reinforcing colonial structures with dominant concerns. Finally, the immersed in inquiry dimension advocates for continued learning while striving for justice (Bondy et al., 2017). In order to enact these seven dimensions in educational settings, teachers must cultivate in themselves, and their students, the dispositions of radical openness, humility, self-vigilance, and persistent patience to stay the course (Bondy et al., 2017). Prior research also pointed to dispositions, self-reflection, and prior experiences as important factors shaping preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards SJE (Kelly-Jackson, 2015).

There are some studies that focus more specifically on teacher development of sociopolitical consciousness and a commitment to SJE (Freire, 2021). Belknap's dissertation (2020) began with the premise that teachers have varying understandings of social justice which are constructed from their individual experiences. Belknap evaluated her participants' understandings of social justice with reference to Fraser's three components of justice: economic, cultural, and political, and assessed if her participants had a complex understanding of the systems that perpetuated injustice. She suggested that a combination of lived experiences relating to injustice and an academic background can lead educators towards developing a complex, theoretical conception of social justice, the language to describe SJE, and the ability to do transformative work in the area of SJE (Belknap, 2020).

Freire (2021) used the term "conscientization calls" for personal and observed experiences around inequity that led to social justice conscientization for teachers. In contrast to much of the

existing literature around pre-service or novice teacher experiences in SJE, Freire's (2021) case study focused on an experienced teacher's experiences throughout her life, and how these served as conscientization calls for her development of sociopolitical awareness and commitment to SJE. Teacher conscientization involved "deep awareness of critical perspectives on social inequities at both micro and macro levels and recognition of dominant structural forces that oppress minoritized individuals to counter them" (Freire, 2021, p. 235). He pointed out that research into teacher conscientization is necessary because most educators working with minoritized students are privileged in comparison to their students, educators may lack knowledge about students' communities and experiences, or educators may have yet to develop sociopolitical consciousness that would serve as a foundation for implementing SJE in schools (Freire, 2021).

In a review of the literature around pre-service and novice teacher experiences in relation to the Justice Praxis Framework (Bondy et al., 2017), Reagan and Hambacher (2021) found research supporting the idea many pre-service and novice teachers exhibited radical hope in their commitment to enact change through education. Many engaged in and modeled democratic processes in their classrooms, creating environments in which students could hear and express diverse perspectives (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). Though the research found teachers at various places on the journey towards critical consciousness and social justice action, many were able to identify systemic or structural injustices (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). However, not many novice teachers engaged with the restorative dimension of the Justice Praxis Framework, but the authors speculated that perhaps more experienced teachers might enact restorative practices on the macro level to challenge systemic oppression through healing (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). This research on justice in teaching praxis documented many teachers raising questions and

considering multiple perspectives, which scholars connected to a “willingness to be disturbed,” an essential quality in democratic pedagogies (Bondy et al., 2017; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021, p. 10). A few studies looked at social justice teachers’ emotional struggles as pre-service or novice teachers, suggesting the importance of acknowledging emotional work as part of the profession and the potential value of supportive professional communities for teachers in SJE (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). Reagan and Hambacher recommended research around teacher responses to evolving concepts of justice that involve an awareness of positionalities, asking questions like “justice for whom?” and “according to whom?” (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021, p. 10), along with further research on assessing the effectiveness of SJE instruction.

Contexts for SJE in Hawai‘i

With settler colonialism as the framework for this inquiry, it seems that the broad definitions of SJE above (Bell, 2023; Nieto & Bode, 2018) may not address education injustice issues in Hawai‘i. Some oppressions are invisible to settlers, and many conversations around SJE have taken place within institutions and communities shaped by coloniality (Patel, 2016; Saranillio, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2018). The SJE language around fairness, respect, and dignity for all people (Nieto & Bode, 2018) or the detailed definitions of oppression (Adams et al., 1997) in the SJE definitions above may seem vague enough to accommodate the specific justice concerns for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi peoples. However, Patel (2016) argues that the ubiquity of terms like “social justice,” “equity,” and “diversity” on school websites and in education research do not necessarily represent actual justice, as such terms are often employed within institutions of coloniality for their own benefit and are insufficient for addressing the “erasure and dehumanization” of settler colonialism (p. xiv).

‘ŌiwiCrit sheds light on why some definitions of SJE are insufficient for addressing injustices in Hawai‘i (Balutski & Wright, 2016). Definitions that speak about treating all people equally, without attending to specific histories or contexts, fail to address specific racism and subjugation towards Kānaka ‘Ōiwi in the context of Asian settler colonialism. This idea of a divergence between discourses of equity and justice, and the justice concerns of colonized groups in states of ongoing settler colonialism resonates with Tuck and Yang (2012), who argue that decolonization wants something different than “civil and human rights-based social justice projects,” because it is about the actual repatriation of Indigenous land and life, not a metaphor for things like social justice, critical methodologies, or “settler moves to innocence” that continue to enmesh Indigenous peoples and places in further instances of settler colonialism and evasions of settler complicity (2012, p. 2). In other words, using decolonization as a metaphor for other educational projects, even social justice ones, “kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). Indeed, looking at such questions through the lens of Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i, it is clear that the general language prevalent in SJE definitions can obscure the specific rights and claims of Indigenous people, which are fundamentally different from those of settlers, immigrants, or other minority groups (Balutski & Wright, 2016). In other words, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi are not simply another minority or ethnic group who should have the same rights as settlers to fairness, respect, and dignity. There are specific, place-based rights based on kuleana that precede settler colonization, which are a priority for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi educators and education scholars when thinking about justice in education.

Scholars have noted the central role of education as a way to “transform colonialism at deep levels of knowledge, pedagogy, the shaping of minds and discourses” (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 6). It is important to center Indigenous understandings of what constitutes knowledge, and what the purpose of education might be, especially in an occupied settler state where the status quo of education is often at odds with Indigenous wisdom and epistemologies. Knowledge in Indigenous contexts is situated and contextualized, unique to cultures, localities, and societies (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous ways of knowing and being should have its own frameworks, theories, language, methodologies, and practices instead of being defined by existing academic disciplines (Tuck et al., 2018). In the Kānaka ‘Ōiwi world view, education defined by Hawaiian ways of knowing prioritize the following in interconnected ways: spiritual knowledge; cultural knowledge passed down continuously from generation to generation; ‘āina as the source of both knowledge and sustenance; bodily and sense experiences including intuition; reciprocity, interdependence, and relationships; purposeful knowledge for supporting families and communities; appropriate use of words; and knowledge as rooted in body, awareness, spirit, and place (Meyer, 2001).

In particular, education serves the function of empowering people to better their communities. In gaining knowledge, one asks its purpose, i.e. how knowledge will improve the lives of families and communities. While Western education focuses on jobs and income potential, education in Hawai‘i should prioritize the needs and concerns of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi as the first peoples of this place (Meyer, 2016). Place is central to this conversation of what constitutes justice in education in Hawai‘i, since it is central to Hawaiian epistemology as well as to settler colonialism. In Hawaiian ways of knowing, land is more than a place, and more

than the Western concept of land as commodity. Land or ‘āina is that which feeds and provides knowledge, it is what “grounds knowledge and contextualizes learning,” it is the source of learning and knowing (Meyer, 2001, 2016). Justice in these contexts would involve making a connection between Hawaiian epistemologies and issues of land and sustainability, for the ultimate purpose of improving schools, health, and survivance for Hawaiian peoples (Meyer, 2016).

The Hawaiian concept of kuleana is also vital to understanding why Kānaka Māoli concerns differ from settler concerns over justice. Kuleana are rights, responsibilities, and authority based on specific ancestry and place (Aikau et al., 2016; Kaomea, 2009; Warner, 1999). Kuleana is relational and specific, and this definition recognizes that Kānaka ‘Ōiwi kuleana is fundamentally different from settler roles and responsibilities, by virtue of the historical, genealogical, and material relationships to Hawai‘i. Each person, Indigenous or settler, has a specific social location in relation to actual geographical places, people, land, and collective well-being. These social locations inform a set of roles and responsibilities, which include knowing when and how to enact them (Kaomea, 2009a; Patel, 2016).

The historical context for this type of education in Hawai‘i is one of perseverance, adaptation, and innovation within hostile colonial structures. Western contact brought destructive diseases which led to a population collapse for Hawaiian people (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992; Stannard, 1989) and disrupted a balanced system of people connected to ‘āina who were deeply observant, skilled at resource management, and creators and connoisseurs of art (Reyes et al., 2020). Adapting to the consequences of contact with the West, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi transitioned to a constitutional monarchy, sought knowledge from other countries, and adopted the written

word, among other things (Reyes et al., 2020). In 1893, a coup d'état led by sugar businessmen, and with the support of the U.S. military, overthrew Queen Lili'uokalani, head of a sovereign nation, which was soon followed by the 1898 annexation of Hawai'i to the U.S. (Reyes et al., 2020).

Education for Kānaka'Ōiwi students under colonial occupation was an extended “educational nightmare” with poor educational, health, and socioeconomic outcomes (Kahakalau, 2003, p. 1). Kahakalau points out how from the beginning of Western contact with Hawai'i, the prevalent mindset was that Hawaiians were “exotic, irrational, childish, and ignorant people” despite evidence that Hawaiians had a sophisticated social, economic, political, religious, cultural, and ecological society (Kahakalau, 2003, p. 8). The Western mindset also assumed that it was the responsibility of White men to civilize and enlighten the “savages.” With the arrivals of missionaries, this attitude began to include Christianity as a way to elevate the natives from heathenism. In other words, the mindset of Westerners who came to Hawai'i was that their ways were superior to the culture found here, and better for the people found here (Kahakalau, 2003).

Many Hawaiians internalized the idea that Western culture, language, religion, and knowledge were superior, more civilized, and would provide spiritual salvation along with economic, cultural, and personal liberation (Kahakalau, 2003). According to Kahakalau, instead of promoting a bilingual or bicultural society in Hawai'i, missionaries imposed an assimilating force which meant suppressing Hawaiian culture (Kahakalau, 2003). Of course, the intent to secure Native lands could not be separated from the cultural, linguistic, and religious erasure brought by missionary principles (Kahakalau, 2003). The idea of “West was best” became

internalized by Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, and those who continued in Hawaiian thinking or practices were condemned as evil or intellectually inferior (Kahakalau, 2003).

Perservering through this colonial history, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi scholars and activists continued to further the well-being of lāhui Hawai‘i through the cultivation of ea (breath, life, sovereignty) in education (Reyes et al., 2020). The term ea also has a meaning of political sovereignty. Culturally-based education has been an important part of these efforts, promoting socio-emotional learning, a grounding in Kānaka identity, and positive educational outcomes for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi students in the face of colonial structures and deficit narratives (Wright, 2018). Beyond academic outcomes, culturally-based education also shapes the ways in which Kānaka ‘Ōiwi students see their connections and kuleana (rights, responsibilities, authority) to the project of nation building (Reyes et al., 2020; Wright, 2018). Schools focused on Hawaiian language revitalization, immersion, and Hawaiian-focused curriculum and pedagogies aim to transform “transform traditional K-12 deficits-oriented structures to environments of abundance that utilize ancestral knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy, Hawaiian ways of being and knowing, and contemporary sociocultural, sociopolitical contexts to inspire ‘Ōiwi youth to forge anti-colonial, success-based cultural identities” (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013; Wright, 2018, p. 20).

Complicating the justice issues around education for Hawaiian survivance, there are histories of separate schooling that persist in intersecting ways. Scholars of educational history in Hawai‘i have documented socioeconomic and ethnic stratification, divestment from the public school system, and the weakening of civic engagement within a diverse democracy (Bayer, 2009; Lawrence, 2005; Okamura, 2008). These include the relatively high percentage

of children in Hawai‘i attending private schools, ranging from 17.4% to 21.5% in the years between 1947 and 1989 (Bayer, 2009; Hughes, 1993), while U.S. averages of private school enrollment are around 10% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This is an equity issue because students from the socioeconomically privileged groups constituted the majority of private school students, while public schools have faced chronic underfunding since the 1970s (Okamura, 2008). Another aspect that reinforced separate schooling was the idea that only some children needed Western education in preparation for advanced studies in the continental U.S., i.e. children of missionaries and ali‘i children (Bayer, 2009). Schools serving these students prepared them for leadership roles in the future while keeping them separate from Hawaiian language and culture (Benham and Heck, 1998; Chun, 2006; Dotts and Sikkema, 1994; Kamehameha Schools, 2006; Malo 1996; Menton, 1992; Wist, 1940, as cited in Bayer, 2009; Hughes, 1993).

In the late 19th century, the influx of laborers from a variety of different countries, speaking different languages, led to the development of Hawaiian creole pidgin English (Bayer, 2009). Despite the fact that both English and Hawaiian were official languages of the Territory of Hawai‘i, English was the only language of public school instruction from 1896 (Wist, 1940, as cited in Hughes, 1993). In this context, children who could not prove proficiency in standard American English were denied admission to English Standard public schools, which were attended by a very small percentage (2-9%) of all school-aged children in Hawai‘i, and who were mostly White (Dotts and Sikkema, 1994; Tamura, 1994 as cited in Bayer, 2009). Supporters of this system of separate schooling argued that children who spoke English were “held back” by classmates who were less proficient in the language, that children of American ancestry would

be dominated by “foreign” influences rather than “Americanizing” ones, and that English-speaking parents had a right to “acceptable” public education for their children (Hughes, 1993, p. 70).

The American assimilationist policy in education applied not only to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi but also to the children of various ethnic groups who came to Hawai‘i as laborers. During the middle of the 20th century, political leaders were supportive of funding public education, and public school graduates from schools like McKinley High School attained social and political prominence and continued to advocate for public education. More importantly, those who thrived in such a system attained new levels of power in 1959, displacing the haole oligarchy but replacing it with a largely East Asian one (Kahakalau, 2003). Curriculum continued to be Western-centric. Being American was valorized and promoted in education, based on what Kahakalau calls “haole paradigms,” well into the 20th century (Kahakalau, 2003), which perpetuated “colonizing and assimilationist policies designed to eradicate Indigenous cultures and languages” (Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017, p. 314S).

Subsequent declines in state education funding had profound negative repercussions that persist today, inequitably affecting groups of people heavily represented in the public school system in terms of their income potential and upward mobility (Okamura, 2008). In Hawai‘i’s single statewide school system, instead of separate districts funded by property tax revenue, the Hawai‘i Department of Education (DOE) gets its funding through appropriations by the state legislature, which does not distribute the money in equitable ways (Okamura, 2008). In comparison to other schools in the United States, Hawai‘i’s DOE ranks poorly in state funding, student-teacher ratio, length of school year, and teacher compensation (Okamura, 2008).

Furthermore, during the time period examined by Okamura, the DOE had been receiving lower and lower portions of the state budget every year, which is far short of actual need and part of a pattern of persistent underfunding of DOE schools. In the years since 2008, the situation with public school funding in Hawai‘i has not improved (J. Okamura, personal communication, Mar 2, 2023).

Such underfunding led to ethnic stratification in Hawai‘i, where White, Japanese American, and Chinese American residents of Hawai‘i dominate in political representation, economic status, and educational attainment, in contrast to Kānaka Maoli, Filipino Americans, Southeast Asians, Polynesians, and Micronesians (Okamura, 2008). In particular, the largest ethnic groups in Hawai‘i’s single public school district are Kānaka Maoli (26%) and Filipino American (22%) (Halagao, 2016), in percentages significantly larger than their representation within the general population. The percentages of the socioeconomically privileged ethnic groups (White, Japanese American, Chinese American) are relatively much lower in public schools than they are in the state population; instead, they constitute a majority of private school students who are being prepared for a university education on the continental U.S. (Okamura, 2008). Okamura argues that such underfunding of public schools is a symptom of institutional discrimination against the ethnic groups that comprise the bulk of public school students in Hawai‘i. For Okamura, these factors clearly perpetuated gaps in educational quality, educational opportunities, and socioeconomic mobility for different groups of students in Hawai‘i.

Educational Efforts Towards Hawaiian Survivance

Despite Western, Eurocentric models of curriculum and pedagogy imposed as standards for education in Hawai‘i, educators and scholars responded to persistent colonial structures in

diverse and innovative ways, often while working within such structures, making connections to existing ideas in SJE literature, and reaching beyond the colonial status quo. Much writing about justice in curriculum and pedagogy addresses the question of teaching marginalized groups and raising critical consciousness among student populations around the structures that shape their lives and experiences (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). There is a body of literature on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies for education in Hawai‘i, with the shared goals of valuing Hawaiian students’ cultural knowledge and backgrounds, rectifying the colonial erasure of Hawaiian language and knowledge, and ensuring the survivance of linguistic, cultural, and literary practices from and for Kānaka Māoli (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013; Kahakalau, 2003; Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017; Kaomea et al., 2019; Kukahiko, 2019; Maunakea, 2019, 2021; Oliveira, 2019; Twomey & Johnson, 2019; Warner, 1999, 2001). Educators have rarely applied such ideas in isolation, but often by finding resonance between culture-based education and existing ideas in SJE literature. For example, Makaiau applied a philosopher’s pedagogy (Philosophy for Children Hawai‘i, or p4CHI) as a form of culturally responsive pedagogy in a high school ethnic studies context to engage the “cultural and linguistic diversities” of diverse students, in ways that resonate with the ideas of Dewey and Freire (Makaiau, 2017). Kana‘iaupuni et al. (2017) explicitly framed their study on culture-based education within Indigenous perspectives and social justice scholarship. Halagao (2016) employed multicultural education and intersectionality in shedding light on Filipino student achievement and opportunities in Hawai‘i’s public schools.

Theoretical conceptions of culture-based education show a contradiction: that schools can oppress and marginalize while also carrying the possibility of empowerment and liberation

(Yosso, 2005). Racism in schools appeared, for example, in deficit thinking about minoritized populations, which led to beliefs that the lack of “normative cultural knowledge and skills” were due to the fault of minority students and families (Yosso, 2005). Schools then responded by addressing the perceived deficits rather than challenging the hierarchies that placed some types of knowledge over others (Yosso, 2005). Researchers responded by focusing on marginalized groups through a pathologizing lens, without examining historical or structural factors (Patel, 2016). In the deficit paradigm dominant throughout the 1960s-1970s, the goal of education was to “eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). In other words, educators engaged in the banking model of education with minoritized students (Freire, 1970), filling up their presumably passive and empty minds with “lower-order rote skills” and “cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society,” one shaped by White, middle-class values (Paris, 2012; Spitzman & Balconi, 2019; Yosso, 2005, p. 75). The following sections look at some educational concepts and practical efforts in Hawai‘i that respond to oppressive or marginalizing approaches in education, all of which fall within the broad spectrum of culture-based education: language revitalization, Hawaiian-focused charter schools, sovereign pedagogies, and ‘āina-based education. These efforts sought to address and resist colonial erasures, and to promote Kānaka ‘Ōiwi survivance through education.

Language Revitalization

An account of the Hawaiian language revitalization movement has to begin with the advocacy and scholarship of Sam No’eau L. Warner, founder of Hawaiian immersion preschool ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and an active leader in the Hawaiian language immersion movement (Maaka &

Wong, 2016). Warner (2001) situated the Hawaiian language and cultural revitalization movement in the context of Hawaiian's settler colonial history, detailing the ban on Hawaiian language in schools, the myth that embracing English language would lead to economic prosperity for Hawaiians, and the resulting loss of prestige and interest in Hawaiian language among Hawaiians. Relegating 'ōlelo Hawai'i to the margins of a Western-centric educational system created a monolingual society with a monocultural approach to education that also marginalized Hawaiian ways of knowing and being (Oliveira, 2019).

The late-1970s Hawaiian Renaissance was a time of increased interest in Hawaiian language and arts. More Hawaiians began to advocate for the revival of 'ōlelo Hawai'i as a living language (Oliveira, 2020a). This was an act of resistance against cultural imperialism, and affirmation of the belief that language was inextricably connected to identities, values, and cultures, and thus was essential for Native Hawaiians to thrive (Oliveira, 2020a). In 1978, Hawaiian was recognized as one of the state's two official languages, along with English (Warner, 2001). With greater awareness around the risk of language loss, and fewer than 50 children who were native speakers of 'ōlelo makuahine in the early 1980s, language educators and community members recognized the need to nurture new generations of Hawaiian speakers. Language activists organized 'Aha Pūnana Leo (APL) with such a goal. The first Pūnana Leo (language nest) Hawaiian immersion preschool opened in 1984. The organization steadily increased the number of schools and children served among the various islands, with demand exceeding capacity during its initial years. To allow Pūnana Leo graduates to continue maintaining their Hawaiian language abilities, the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE)

implemented the Kula Kaiapuni program in 1987, and again in 1989 and 1992 to support students through the 12th grade (Warner, 2001).

Hawaiian-Focused Charter Schools

The Hawaiian charter school movement was part of efforts to ameliorate the “educational nightmare” for Native Hawaiian students imposed by colonial occupation and Western educational systems, but more specifically, for communities and educators to have more input, flexibility, and better support for educating students within local, community-led schools serving Hawaiian people (Kahakalau, 2003). The first Hawaiian charter school, Kanu o ka ‘Āina, was built for Hawaiians and designed by Hawaiians, for the purpose of empowering Hawaiian people (Kahakalau, 2003).

In leading the charter school movement and documenting this process in her dissertation, Kahakalau (2003) advocated for a curricular approach called Education with Aloha (EA). This included meeting students where they are, giving them room to explore their interests, hands-on experiential learning, building connections to communities, and drawing on spiritual connections to nature and other aspects of place. Much of what she described resonates not only with principles of Hawaiian epistemology, but also with the practices of inclusive, inquiry-based approaches. Kahakalau (2003) found that Indigenous students preferred educational contexts that were responsive to their cultures, and concluded that the poor performance and achievement of Native Hawaiian students in Western educational systems were due to the incompatibility of learning styles, learning systems, and cultural orientations, and not due to any inherent fault or deficit on the part of the students. This idea is also an important one in culture-based educational movements that encompass culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Kahakalau (2003) connected EA with two education movements connected to SJE:

1. Liberatory pedagogy based on the Freirean idea of conscientization, which Kahakalau argues is like decolonization for Hawaiians. In other words, liberatory education that nurtures the development of critical consciousness is also decolonizing and essential for Native Hawaiian education;
2. Twentieth-century educational practices involving greater curricular relevance for students, connections to real-world challenges, responsiveness to students' social and cultural lived experiences, more voice and agency for students, and a breakdown of boundaries between traditional disciplinary silos.

Throughout her leadership and scholarship, Kahakalau used the phrase “ancient is modern” to connect traditional Hawaiian practices and “modern” educational ideas that came into vogue in Western education discourse (Kahakalau, 2003, 2004, 2019b, 2019a, 2020; Kahakalau et al., 2007). Kahakalau suggested that the EA approach is not only for Native Hawaiian students but for all students in Hawai‘i, as it uses the principles of Native Hawaiian education to reconnect all learners to Hawaiian ways of knowing and ways of being, and dismantles colonial indoctrination (Kahakalau, 2003). The Kanu o ka ‘Āina model also inspired other educators and community members to create culturally driven models of education that met the specific needs of their communities.

Towards Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Culture-based education developed as a response to deficit thinking about minoritized school children measured against dominant values and culture, but also in exploration of more “culturally congruent” ways to engage learning (Au & Jordan, 1981, p. 141). The Kamehameha

Early Elementary Program (KEEP) was a research project that found existing solutions for literacy ineffective. Instead of focusing on children's reading deficits, KEEP focused on pedagogy and the cultural backgrounds of the children. KEEP's success was attributed to a storytelling or talk story type of interaction, whereby teachers valued and affirmed students' everyday experiences, and encouraged them to apply their voices and perspectives to their reading. This project supported ongoing work to help teachers contextualize instruction to students' cultures and languages. KEEP led to the Center for Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), currently based at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. CREDE continues the work of KEEP in promoting contextualized, talk story types of interactions, termed "Instructional Conversations." The latest CREDE Hawai'i project is examining Instructional Conversations for Equitable Participation (Yamauchi et al., 2020).

Schools continued to measure student success against the dominant culture of schools, making minoritized students fit into a hierarchical, supposedly meritocratic system defined by White, middle-class values. The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) aimed to redefine success for minoritized students, examine how classroom practices can respond to social structures in a critical way, and promote success in oppressive contexts. In Ladson-Billings' studies (1995a, 1995b), teachers who were practicing CRP nurtured students who were academically successful, demonstrated cultural integrity and competence, and were able to both understand and critique the social order so as to participate as active citizens in a democracy. CRP also presented a critique of oppressive institutional and social contexts for schooling, going beyond classrooms and curriculum to include community, critical consciousness, metacognition, identity, and challenges to dominant ways of knowing.

Paris and Alim (2012; 2017) advocated for a shift in focus and terminology towards culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP). While it was important to leverage students' funds of knowledge and bridge cultural differences to help them succeed, Paris and Alim argue that CRP still aimed to have students embrace and be measured by dominant school values. CSP pushed educators and scholars to question whether cultural responsiveness is sufficient for nurturing and perpetuating the "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism" (Paris, 2012, p. 93) that are essential to a diverse democracy. In conceptualizing CSP, Paris moved the conversation beyond valuing the diversity of students' backgrounds to also include the goal of actively ensuring the perpetuation of a "multiethnic and multilingual" democracy (2012, p. 93).

Sovereign Pedagogies

The idea of sovereign pedagogies developed out of a longer history of Hawaiian cultural and political movements for self-determination starting in the 1970s. Educators, activists, and Hawaiian families advocated and organized to create Hawaiian language immersion programs and Hawaiian-focused charter schools (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013). These community-led efforts centering 'aina-based literacies had transformative impacts both within the schools, and outside of school settings. Indigenous educators and students involved in the founding of Hawaiian charter schools experienced an articulation of their identities as builders and shapers, people with agency over their pasts, presents, and futures. Not only was the founding of Hawaiian charter schools an act of reclaiming K-12 education by Hawaiians for Hawaiian self-determination, the movement continued to serve as a foundation against settler colonial forces of erasure and assimilation. As such, this movement was not just education reform, but also an important expression of Hawaiian cultural survivance, well-being, and nationhood. Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's

conceptualization of sovereign pedagogies also influenced other work like Kana‘iaupuni et al. (Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017) and Kaomea et al. (2019).

In practice, the sovereign pedagogies of aloha ‘āina drew from critical pedagogy and critical literacy, and served as the backbone of Hawaiian resistance to U.S. colonialism and imperialism. However, there is tension in the existence of Hawaiian charter schools within a settler colonial state, subject to imposed standards like No Child Left Behind (NCLB). An examination of such tensions added complexity to a settler versus Indigenous binary, wherein educational endeavors like Hawaiian charter schools can exist, but only if contained to “safe” degrees of cultural difference as defined by settler authorities. In Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua’s analysis, the idea of containment and Native cultural growth can coexist, the latter finding ways to emerge like new growth in lava. However, she concluded that historical inequalities in Hawaiian education can never fully be eradicated without the end of colonial structures and the attainment of Hawaiian sovereignty. In such a constrained system, one of the most powerful ways to challenge settler colonialism is for Indigenous people and settlers to support Indigenous-led communities in continuing to practice and transform ancestral epistemologies on their own terms (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013).

Indigenous Culture-Based Education

The work of Kana‘iaupuni et al. (2017) is an example of culture-based education (CBE) situated in Hawai‘i, and part of a shift from the assimilation of minoritized students to the revitalization of marginalized languages and cultures. The terminology also evolved from culturally congruent to culturally relevant, culturally sustaining, culturally revitalizing, and then to CBE, which includes elements of the earlier orientations. The historical contexts of CBE are

that of Indigenous experiences in schools, which perpetuated “colonizing and assimilationist policies designed to eradicate Indigenous cultures and languages” (Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017, p. 314S).

CBE used the concepts of “cultural advantage” or “funds of knowledge” with the goals of building on and enhancing “the linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and affective strengths possessed by Indigenous students,” including “efforts to revitalize languages, knowledge, practices, and beliefs lost or suppressed through colonization or occupation” (Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017, p. 314S). CBE was explicitly based on Indigenous critical pedagogy and sovereign pedagogies in applying the cultural advantage framework to education, intentionally nurturing the development of students into agents of resistance and change, and developing a community’s self-determination and sovereignty with an awareness of an Indigenous past, present, and future (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013, as cited in Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017). With CBE, there were direct positive outcomes of CBE for student experiences in schools: increased feelings of belonging at school, greater sense of self-efficacy, deeper connections to community, and higher levels of college aspirations (Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017).

‘Āina-Based Education

Reconnecting Indigenous people to land is essential in efforts to decolonize through education. Throughout the various responses described above, the role of place and ‘āina have appeared often as important aspects of education for Kānaka survivance, which is based on the idea that ‘āina is a rich fount of knowledge and inextricably connected to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi people and communities. ‘Āina-based education is how Kānaka ‘Ōiwi have thought about education for generations before the term itself became prevalent in more mainstream education discourse

(Maunakea, 2021). ‘Āina-based education is multidisciplinary, inspired by place, and focuses on relationships between Kānaka ‘Ōiwi and ‘āina. In resonance with Kahakalau’s idea that “ancient is modern,” Ledward described ‘āina-based education as “new old wisdom” (Ledward, 2013). Such an approach can build critical thinking and problem-solving skills through experiential learning with ‘āina, along with deeper understandings of human impacts on environment, and a sense of kuleana and kinship to place, which could lead to greater civic engagement and action (Ledward, 2013). Maunakea (2021) identified ten interconnected pedagogies of ‘āina-based education: genealogy, language, spiritual power, health of ‘āina as measured by productivity, kuleana, aloha ‘āina in terms of caring for place as well as striving for political sovereignty over place, holistic well-being, ancestral and elder wisdom, mo‘olelo, and ‘ohana. Learning environments can include natural ecosystems, regenerative food systems, home and community life, as well as schools for all ages (Maunakea, 2021). In reviewing the literature and laying out these principles, Maunakea is acting on the identified need for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi and Indigenous thinkers to “claim Indigenous identities, research, language, schooling, and systems to make positive differences in Indigenous lives” (Maunakea, 2021, p. 282).

Where This Study Enters the Conversation

The two research questions in this study, what factors shaped educators’ orientation towards social justice education (SJE), and how they define and conceptualize SJE in their current work as educators, are contextualized within three areas of scholarship:

1. Defining SJE,
2. educators’ conscientization towards SJE, and
3. educational efforts that respond to Hawai‘i’s settler colonial contexts.

This inquiry will explore possible gaps or alignments between how teachers in Hawai‘i understand SJE and how it is more broadly defined in the literature. My study of teacher experiences with SJE is at once both more and less specific than the existing literature. I look at K-12 teachers in Hawai‘i, but include teachers with a range of years of experience. By focusing on Hawai‘i and using a framework of settler colonialism, I also explore a range of existing ideas and practices highlighting what SJE looks like when situated in Hawai‘i, in response to settler colonialism. In contrast to some of the existing scholarship, my study is not evaluative and does not examine the degree or quality of teacher preparation for SJE. However, I believe that this study can provide some insights into the complexity and diversity of experiences that have been formative in shaping educators’ orientations towards SJE. Instead of focusing on short-term discrete experiences (like individual courses, field experiences, or guest speakers), or longer-term structured programs, my study is more open as it invites participants to describe any experiences in their life history which they believe had an impact on their social justice educator orientation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To examine the experiences of a diverse group of K-12 educators in Hawai‘i, explore the factors that shaped their orientation towards social justice education (SJE), and their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE in their current work as educators, I used an adapted, hybrid phenomenological approach I call phenomenology with settler awareness. I surveyed and interviewed K-12 educators in Hawai‘i who self-identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation.

The goal of this chapter is to describe how a constructivist epistemology and the theoretical framework of settler colonialism aligns closely with a hybrid phenomenological approach inspired by elements of Indigenized phenomenology and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This hybrid phenomenological methodology provided a basis for an exploration of researcher positionality and subjectivities, and also shaped the choices around participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and data presentation for this study.

Epistemology

This inquiry is a qualitative, constructivist study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) exploring the lived experiences of K-12 teachers in Hawai‘i who self identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in their work as educators, through their words, stories, and lived experiences. This is a constructivist study because the knowledge I am seeking is not static, pre-existing, or waiting to be unearthed. Instead, it is “constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23).

I chose a qualitative approach which values participant stories, words, and experiences as meaningful and reliable data. Participants share their own understandings of their lived

experiences, based on their perceptions, and in their own words. As researcher, I also interpret the ways in which they make sense of their experiences, with the understanding that meaning is always embedded in and shaped by contexts, relationships, and situations (Bhattacharya, 2017; Patel, 2016).

Qualitative approaches are compatible with critical analyses which are concerned with investigating questions of power and justice, and supporting research that also serves as action and advocacy (Hays & Singh, 2011). Critical theories are those that focus on how structures of oppression function within the lived experiences of people (Bhattacharya, 2017). Since the focus of the study is SJE, I use a methodological approach that aligns with the critical theoretical framework of settler colonialism, one that recognizes the presence of oppression as well as the possibility for liberation in research and education. The idea that education can and should be liberatory is fundamental in the scholarship on social justice education (Adams et al., 2018; Bondy et al., 2017; Freire, 1970; Yosso, 2005). More specifically for this study, education and research are important realms for building critical consciousness, enacting empowerment, and perpetuating languages, wisdom, practices, and value systems of ancestral Indigenous knowledge (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013; Meyer, 2016; Oliveira, 2020b; Salis Reyes, 2019; Smith, 2021).

Settler colonialism sheds light on how Native Hawaiian rights, claims, and concerns are not the same as those of settler groups, even as dominant discourses about Hawai'i as a harmonious multicultural paradise continue to obscure the specific concerns and experiences of Native Hawaiian people (Fujikane, 2008; Reyes, 2018; Trask, 2008). Indigeneity is a particular concern for this inquiry. Thus, this study also draws on the wisdom of Indigenous methodologies, especially Kānaka 'Ōiwi methodologies that prioritize lived experiences, relationships to

people/place/things, reciprocity, accountability, and nationhood (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019; Wilson, 2008). In my methodology, I choose to learn from scholars who have thoughtfully formulated and employed a decolonizing/Indigenizing mindset in conducting research (Patel, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

In her essay on Hawaiian epistemology, Manulani Aluli Meyer (2016) asserts that function is central to the process of gaining knowledge. Research about education, or any kind of knowledge, is a waste of time if it does not serve, benefit, and honor the values of the first peoples of this place. As such, the pursuit of knowledge (i.e., research) on education should support liberatory, culturally sustaining education. Decolonizing or Indigenizing qualitative approaches are not only responses to the ways in which colonizing forces have shaped research traditions and education to serve colonial purposes, but also a way to assert presence, elevate lāhui, and ensure survivance (Patel, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019; Smith, 2021).

A qualitative approach also allows for reaching beyond positivist or colonial research practices (Patel, 2016; Smith, 2021), which includes eschewing deficit narratives that are part of colonizer discourses (Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Instead, I am inspired by research approaches that focus on community assets and “goodness” in the participants’ backgrounds and cultures (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Yosso, 2005), and which value intuition and sense experiences as a valid form of knowledge (Wilson, 2008). It is also important to prioritize the contexts and social locations occupied by participants, along with their relationships to people and places (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2016; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Patel, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019). This emphasis shaped the ways in which I recruited participants and elicited their experiences during the data collection process.

It is neither new nor radical to combine different approaches for a qualitative study (Bhattacharya, 2017). Salis Reyes's (2016) Indigenized phenomenology drew upon both phenomenological and Indigenous methodologies, in the tradition of qualitative researchers using diverse, interconnected, qualitative practices to "make the world visible in diverse ways" (Salis Reyes, 2016, p. 98). By thoughtfully bringing together phenomenology and Indigenous methodologies in "dialogue and creative tension," Salis Reyes (2016) explored multiple perspectives and dimensions in the complex topic of Native college graduates giving back to their communities.

Early in my graduate school program, when I first read about decolonizing, Indigenous, or Kānaka ʻŌiwi methodologies (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, 2016; Patel, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019; Smith, 2021), I did not understand how I might learn from these readings beyond understanding the historical and intellectual contexts that these scholars were, and still are, responding to. I am still unsure about whether a methodology like Indigenized phenomenology was something for a non-Kānaka scholar to take and apply, to a study with participants who were not all Kānaka ʻŌiwi, with issues that did not center Hawaiian concerns, and with research questions that come from a settler point of view.

My choice of learning from Indigenized phenomenology aligns with the framework of settler colonialism for this study, and the awareness that as a settler, I inevitably have blind spots where Native Hawaiian issues are concerned. Also, in considering my responsibility around what is at stake in this research, and who might benefit from it (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, 2016), I gather wisdom from Indigenized phenomenology (Salis Reyes, 2019) because the approach centers many issues that I want to continue to be aware of, and I also apply other aspects of

phenomenology that support my attention to settler awareness, like positionality, relationships, and obligations as part of the research process.

A Hybrid Phenomenological Study

This inquiry uses phenomenology because of its fundamental concern with the knowledge and experiences that come from participants' interactions, perceptions, and memories of the phenomenon of SJE (Moustakas, 1994). By asking participants to focus intentionally on a phenomenon, the researcher draws upon the perceptual experiences to derive the essences or structures of that experience in the world (Moustakas, 1994). As such, this study focuses on “what” and “how” questions in SJE, namely:

1. What experiences shaped K-12 educators' orientation towards SJE?
2. How do K-12 educators in Hawai'i define and conceptualize SJE?

Through detailed exploration of participants' lived experiences, this inquiry gets closer to the elements that constitute the experience of being a social justice educator, without which the experience would not be SJE. In other words, I look at particular experiences to get a clearer picture of the collective experience. Phenomenological studies often seek to define the “essence” or “structures” of the experience, but that is not necessarily a generalization. Phenomenologists focus both on the essence of the experiences as well as variations of experience (Hays & Singh, 2011), providing room for participants to experience SJE in varying ways, to have experiences that are neither static nor one-dimensional, which add depth and complexity to our understandings of the phenomenon.

In addition to being grounded in a phenomenological philosophy, this qualitative study also draws on some elements of Indigenized phenomenology (Salis Reyes, 2016, 2019) and

interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, 2022; Smith & Nizza, 2022; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Tuffour, 2017) to bring forth participants' lived experiences and sense-making in the realm of SJE. My adapted approach is not a faithful application of one of the established forms of phenomenology, but rather includes these phenomenological elements:

1. epoché as a lens through which I explore my positionality, subjectivities, and relationship to the study (rather than bracketing myself from it);
2. horizontalization, approaching things from the same horizon line at the beginning;
3. double hermeneutic, where the researcher interprets the interpretations of participants;
4. idiography, a focus on particular details of each participant before the big picture.

These elements in turn inform the process of participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and presentation. The following sections elaborate on each of the above items.

Researcher Presence, Positionality, and Subjectivities

Husserlian phenomenology suggests that through the process of epoché, researchers can bracket their personal ideas, beliefs, and experiences out of the study in order to reach a purer, more transcendent state of objectivity with regards to the topic of study (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). Through epoché, “the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

However, the idea of transcending or bracketing researcher presence goes against my impulse to attend to researcher relationships and connections to the study. Decolonizing or Indigenizing methodologies prioritize relationships and contexts (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2016; Patel, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019). In particular, Salis Reyes (2019) points out this divergence

between phenomenological epoché and Indigenous methodologies, which value relationships and reciprocity between researcher and the researched (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019). The focus on relationships and reciprocity in research is itself a response to the ways in which research has historically constructed harmful, dehumanizing, and deficit-laden narratives about Native peoples, thus providing a rationale for their political and intellectual oppression (Smith, 2021).

Furthermore, research practices are far from being objective or neutral, and have always been inextricable from relationships, culture, and belief systems (Patel, 2016; Wilson, 2008). This belief forms the basis for exhorting decolonizing researchers to attend to their social locations in relation to participants and research contexts. In other words, researchers have ongoing relationships and responsibilities to “peoples, places, and practices” (Patel, 2016, p. 57). While some research approaches equate distance between researcher and participant(s) with objectivity or neutrality, the researcher’s identities, perspectives, choices, and voice are all important and valuable factors in how the participants’ stories are interpreted and presented. Yet, the idea of separating from one’s perceptions or experiences also diverge from constructivist approaches, which acknowledge that one’s experiences, assumptions, beliefs, and values inevitably shape how we make sense of the world, and in turn, how we make sense of what our participants share with us (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Rather than striving to “bracket” oneself out of the research process, to transcend one’s individual perceptions, some phenomenological researchers advocate for a more vigilant, reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher’s various subject positions, i.e., how one’s experiences, assumptions, beliefs, and values can shape the research (Bhattacharya, 2017; Hua,

2022; Salis Reyes, 2019). This approach suggests that researchers gain knowledge by examining the relationships between self and what is being researched.

Exploration of Positionality

In order to become more aware and transparent about my positionality, I engaged with an in-depth exploration of the following:

1. my relationship to Hawai‘i as a place;
2. my experiences, ideas, assumptions, and definitions of social justice in education;
3. my relationships with participants.

These reflections were not meant to pave the way for a purely neutral or objective inquiry, but rather, to bring greater transparency to the relationships, assumptions, ideas, and beliefs I bring to this endeavor; to prioritize relationships, contexts, and social locations in my research; and to acknowledge researcher subjectivities and personhood in the research process (Bhattacharya, 2017; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Patel, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2016). I begin by looking at my relationship to Hawai‘i and my settler status as part of my positionality and subjectivities.

Relationship to Hawai‘i

My relationship to Hawai‘i affects the way I approach this research study in at least three ways:

1. privilege and associated blind spots,
2. settler status and associated blind spots,
3. disquiet and confusion about what SJE means in Hawai‘i.

Learning about Asian settler colonialism honed my awareness of my privileges in the context of teaching and living in Hawai‘i. With no prior connections to Hawai‘i, I moved to Honolulu in

2015 to teach Mandarin Chinese and lead an after-school Mandarin immersion program at an independent school. As someone of East Asian descent, I am a member of a dominant settler class in terms of political, cultural, and socioeconomic representation (Okamura, 2008). I benefit from assumptions and unearned privileges that accompany this status. Despite having come here as a transplant teacher with little knowledge about Hawaiian histories and contexts, I am often assumed to be “local” rather than an outsider. I live in an affluent neighborhood in East Honolulu on the island of O‘ahu, and teach at an independent school serving around 215 students who have varying degrees of privilege. I did not grow up here. I also did not attend school here before enrolling at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa as a graduate student. These aspects of my positionality could be shortcomings in that I have limited direct experience of education in communities outside of private schools, outside of urban Honolulu, on other Hawaiian islands, or in communities where there are larger percentages of Native Hawaiian, Southeast Asian, or Pacific Islander students. It would be impossible to completely ameliorate such gaps in my experience with regard to my study, but I identify these issues here as a reminder that unexamined assumptions and blind spots can exist for someone with my subjectivities. As such, it is important for me to remain inquisitive about the details and contexts of each participant’s experiences, and to ask clarifying questions as a matter of course. It is also important to maintain a journal throughout the process so that I can keep reflecting on how I am interpreting things and confront possible assumptions or blind spots.

Asian settler colonialism has also led me to consider my settler status and the possible impacts or responsibilities I have. As an immigrant to the United States and a settler in Hawai‘i, discontinuity is a recurring theme in my life. Only upon moving to Hawai‘i did I start thinking

about my roles, impacts, and responsibilities as a resident in a new place. I used to assume that in moving to new places for opportunities, I was simply doing what people had been doing throughout the course of human history; now, this type of assumption strikes me as a convenient way to avoid confronting the impact of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples and lands. The discontinuity of my life experience is in direct contrast to Native Hawaiian connections to land, which are specific to place and deeply intertwined with cultural, historical, material, and genealogical connections (Silva, 2017). Such genealogical connections in turn form the basis of broader social relations (Aikau et al., 2016). The discontinuity I am used to also means I may not fully appreciate the profound value of traditions or lineages that may be important to participants. This realization on my part is a reminder of the gap in my experiences with regards to Native Hawaiian knowledge and experiences, and that persistent and specific reflexivity on this point continues to be important.

Finally, my status in Hawai‘i as both a settler and transplant teacher (defined as one who has moved from one place to another to continue teaching) shaped my interest in this project and the questions I explore. I arrived in Hawai‘i after eight years of teaching in Chicago, with a sense of disquiet around educational inequities (detailed in the next section). This sense of disquiet persisted as I continued to teach in private schools while grappling with whether my choices were strictly personal and private, i.e., unrelated to broader, structural issues around education (Lawrence, 2005). I arrived in Hawai‘i with a strong interest in specific curricular and pedagogical issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and critical thinking, but also observed very different conversations occurring here in Hawai‘i in comparison to the continental U.S. I felt like many administrators, educators, and students might assume that such conversations are moot

here because of the belief that Hawai‘i is racially harmonious, already diverse, and not dominated by a particular group of people. I assumed that people would need to be convinced of the necessity of SJE in Hawai‘i, which might also look very different than in the continental United States. At the very least, I felt that teaching about social justice had to be adapted to local contexts to make it relevant and culturally responsive. Yet, since I continued to serve relatively privileged, largely settler populations, I felt increasingly confused about what social justice meant in Hawai‘i, and what my roles and responsibilities might be. I embarked on this project to learn more about Hawai‘i-specific, place-based social justice teaching in practice, and also in search of deeper conversations with educators who shared my curiosity about such issues. My hope is that this study can be an act of “analysis and solidarity” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), a part of reaching beyond awareness and critiques of settler colonialism towards “focused juxtaposition and dialogue” (Aikau et al., 2016) among educators of different social locations: settler, transplant, and Native Hawaiian, in the project of dismantling settler colonial structures. In the following section, I explore how my experiences have shaped my perspectives towards the topic of SJE.

What SJE Means To Me

As I began to reflect on my thinking around SJE, I realized that my own definitions are quite entangled, shaped by my experiences as student, teacher, and researcher. In trying to clarify this confusion, I have simplified and listed three different levels on which I have thought about social justice issues around education:

1. the broad social, historical, and political levels, where structures, policies, and public attitudes towards education shape funding, oversight, regulation, access, etc.;

2. the school level, where resources, curriculum, staffing, demographics, location, or school culture affect the experiences of students and families served by the school;
3. the classroom level, where teacher attributes, classroom culture, pedagogies, and curriculum can shape students' experiences.

These three levels are related to and overlap with each other. There is also a clear hierarchy in that broader issues at the societal level affect the operations of schools, and in turn, classroom experiences, though it is also possible that influence can occur in different directions. When I think of social justice in education, I have observed oppression at all these levels. I remain skeptical about the possibility of liberation within educational structures as they are. When I think of social justice education (SJE), I include issues of social justice at the school level (efforts towards equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging in terms of admissions, staffing, teacher development, and school culture) and at classroom levels (anti-oppressive pedagogical practices and curricula that explicitly address social justice histories and issues).

While my relationship with SJE may have been shaped by many different things over time, the two most prominent factors are my own K-12 education in Singapore, in a seemingly meritocratic, relentlessly hierarchical system, and first-hand observations of stark inequities between public and private schools in Chicago. After I started teaching at a private school in Chicago, I experienced a conscientization process (Freire, 1970) that honed my thinking about inequities in education, which I carried with me as I started teaching in Hawai'i, and which eventually led to this study.

What I share here are my subjective experiences and may not represent every child's experience in a Singaporean school or the current system of education. As a student in this

former British colony from the late 1970s (starting in kindergarten) through the late 1980s, I grew up believing that educational opportunities were earned solely through how well you did on examinations. I do not remember socioeconomic class being a factor in what types of schools you could attend, though in retrospect it must have played a role as many families hired tutors or otherwise paid for academic enrichment outside of school. Test scores determined your school placements for secondary school (culminating in General Certificate of Education or G.C.E. O levels) and junior college (culminating in G.C.E. A levels), and there were transparent and public rankings of students and schools. The most profound memories and feelings I carry with me about my education in Singapore are a lack of voice and choice, and little space to do my own thinking, as so many things were determined for me by adults, schools, or existing structures and processes. I also felt a sense of being limited by academic tracking starting in primary three (equivalent to third grade), not treated as a full human being, and pushed towards what we now call STEM fields based on my academic performance, despite an affinity for language and literature. The clear message I received throughout my education was that the sciences were superior disciplines, and that I should naturally and unquestioningly pursue them over the humanities because my test results on high-stakes examinations afforded me that possibility. Looking back on my schooling, I realized that I was part of the economically and culturally dominant class of ethnic Chinese Singaporeans, and this privilege likely made it hard for me to see that non-Chinese students were disproportionately more likely to be assigned to “low-progress” tracks of learning and viewed through a deficit lens (Lim & Tan, 2018).

To date, one of my most profound conscientization experiences came from reflecting on the difference between two very different schools in the city of Chicago, Illinois: a selective

enrollment Chicago Public Schools (CPS) high school in South Side Chicago and a private school in an affluent North Side neighborhood. My definition of social justice education has evolved over time, starting with a vague sense that I was doing something that felt “right” because I was working at an underserved school with high percentages of African American and Latino/a students, most of whom were of low socioeconomic status. As part of my training (through the alternative certification program Chicago Teaching Fellows), our goal was to hold students to high expectations, give them an experience in academic rigor to combat a history of deficit narratives about what they could accomplish, and close the achievement gap. It seemed that the act of public school teaching itself was a form of SJE.

Five years later I made what I thought was a personal and private decision to teach at a different school that was more convenient for me. This was a private school in a much more affluent, largely White neighborhood on the North Side of Chicago. The difference was stark in terms of class sizes, teaching load, classroom resources, professional development resources, and school culture. Over time, as I kept in touch with graduates and colleagues from my first school while immersing myself in the culture at my second school, I started to see more clearly how the college experiences, career options, and possibilities of socioeconomic mobility panned out for these two groups of students from the same city but very different demographic backgrounds. What I witnessed looked like white supremacy in action. In my subjective experience, my mostly Black or Latino/a public school students performed better than most of the privileged, wealthy private school students by conventional measures of academic success, but my private school students were more comfortable, sometimes relentless, with negotiating over grades and assessments. My CPS students did not attend the same types of exclusive colleges after high

school, were often saddled with student loan debt after college, then struggled to find living wage jobs that would help them out of poverty. To me, this seemed to be more than a problem with resource allocation among public and private schools, or North Side versus South Side Chicago schools, but rather, a persistent structure that piled onto existing socioeconomic and racial inequities to further suppress the life chances of historically marginalized populations. These subjective observations laid the foundations for a conscientizing experience (Freire, 1970) for me as an educator, and served as part of the basis for this inquiry.

While at the private school in Chicago, I experienced diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) conversations in independent schools for the first time. I also witnessed strong resistance to such efforts among my colleagues, some of whom were hostile to any discussion of student inclusion issues or revising the curriculum to be more global. I saw that these conversations were particularly hard on the faculty of color who advocated for students of color over experiences of alienation, bullying, or biased remarks from students and faculty. I saw lack of critical thinking, unawareness of privilege, and fragility on the part of faculty and students around diversity issues. This led to my thinking of SJE as efforts towards making organizations like this private school more welcoming and inclusive for a wider variety of people, including those outside the historically dominant demographics. I realized that these efforts were important not only in terms of admissions, which might make a school look more diverse, but also in terms of staffing, curriculum, professional development, and school culture. The administration seemed aware that such progress was important for the longer-term sustainability of the school, as demographic trends indicated an increasingly diverse population of school-age children, but I saw many obstacles to progress in these areas.

Teaching in Hawai‘i has pushed me to think about the topic of educational equity in new ways. Injustice in general felt less “binary” here, and I assumed this was due to more complex racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics and histories. I still noticed significant differences between different types of schools, and what looked like big gaps in terms of resources, support, class size, and teacher compensation, which I assumed led to vastly different experiences for students and families. I continued to wonder how private decisions of individual families are seen as separate from the public interest of maintaining a strong public education system, and which children are included in “the community of persons for whom democracy’s decisionmakers feel attachment, empathy, concern, and a moral duty of care” (Lawrence, 2005, p. 1378) when it came to funding their educations. As such, my relationship with SJE was in flux, and I was constantly thinking about, but also confused about, what SJE meant in the context of teaching in Hawai‘i.

Relationships with Participants

Next, I reflect on my relationships with participants as a way to identify possible blind spots with regards to my role as researcher in this study. My participants are K-12 educators in Hawai‘i who self-identified or were identified by peers as having an orientation towards social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial education. Beyond sharing an interest in SJE, it is likely that the participants and I are part of overlapping networks of educators with personal and professional connections across the state of Hawai‘i. I am both an insider and outsider with regards to the professional contexts of the participants. There may be a basis of mutual trust and shared experiences with regards to being educators. Thus, it is important for me to recognize this

assumption, to earn the trust of my participants rather than assuming that I have it, and remain open to findings that may not fit my expectations.

Due to the existing relationships or shared mutual connections with my participants, I also feel a responsibility to present their stories respectfully and authentically, while being transparent about my goals as researcher. However, due to my status as a transplant teacher, it is also likely that there are historical, cultural, or contextual nuances that I do not notice or understand when interviewing teachers who have different life histories and experiences as teachers in Hawai‘i. It is thus important that I record their words accurately, maintain constant skepticism about what I may be assuming or interpreting, conduct member checking with integrity and transparency, and verify the conclusions by iterative references to the data.

Participant Recruitment

I began with purposive sampling for participants who met the following criteria:

1. self-identified as having a SJ, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in their work as educators, and
2. served as full-time K-12 educators in a school in Hawai‘i.

I used these criteria to recruit educators who self-identified as having an orientation towards SJE, based on their own definitions of SJE, because my research questions were about how educators in Hawai‘i developed an orientation towards SJE and how they defined SJE. I did not want to limit the participant pool to those who subscribed to my definition of SJE. In addition, because of my interest in looking at settler awareness and how relationships to place might or might not inform educator ideas around SJE, I included those who might also, or alternatively, think of their work as decolonizing or anti-colonial, but not necessarily under the umbrella of SJE.

I recruited participants primarily through email. My invitation email included a brief description of my research questions and the participant criteria above. I also invited recipients of the email to share it with other educators who might fit the criteria. The email contained a link to a Google survey, which asked for informed consent and collected some background information about the participants. I also included some open-ended questions about their definitions and implementations of SJE. I invited participants to optionally share any materials that would provide more context samples of SJE implementations, such as course syllabi, samples of student work. See Appendix A for this survey.

Keeping in mind the importance of different social locations in relationship to place, I tried to recruit a range of participants with different experiences of education and who might occupy have a variety of relationships to Hawai'i. As I received survey responses, I looked over them and continued to contact potential participants from a variety of different types of school (HIDOE, private, charter, religious), and teaching at different grade levels. Since my first group of survey respondents were more than 50% male, high school teachers, I made an effort to reach out to more women among my own network, especially those who taught at elementary or middle school levels. I also noticed that I received many responses from independent school teachers, perhaps because I was recruiting through colleagues and former colleagues at independent schools, so I made efforts to reach out to more HIDOE and charter school educators. I also made specific efforts to recruit from other islands in the state. I tried to recruit participants from teachers at Hawaiian language immersion schools, as I wondered about how educators perceived language revitalization in the context of SJE. Sometimes I sent messages directly to a school or teacher through the school website. In the recruitment email, I also asked friends,

colleagues, professors, and participants to share the information, and at times I asked participants and other contacts for recommendations of educators I should try to interview, specifically with the goal of including voices from a range of positionalities and social locations. I also sent emails to educators who had presented at conferences and workshops related to social justice issues, sometimes reaching out to them through social media, or asking event organizers or education podcasters to share my request for participants. Ultimately I found that most people who responded to the survey had received the invitation through someone in my own network, and that educators who did not know me were less likely to respond or share the email.

Data Collection

This study is informed by two main types of data, surveys and interviews. Examining the survey data gave me background information about the 40 survey respondents, and as I went through each survey response, I made notes on each one about the ways in which I knew this person and possible follow-up questions I might want to ask them. Then, taking into account a variety of factors from the survey data, including the type of school they taught at, the grade levels, their definitions of SJE, their relationships to Hawai‘i (which I discerned through a direct question and also questions about how much of their education and teacher training they had completed in Hawai‘i), I started contacting a number of the participants for interviews. I did not have a set number of interview participants in mind. I also did not know who was going to agree to two interviews in the time frame I had set aside for data collection. As the interviewing process overlapped with continued recruitment and some preliminary organization and reflection on the data, I decided to continue recruiting, interviewing, and transcribing until I had collected information from a variety of participants with different roles and relationships to Hawai‘i.

In order to conduct in-depth explorations of participants' lived experiences and the meaning they make of their experiences, I set out to gather abundant details and rich contextual information through a series of interviews. I conducted two semi-structured interviews for each participant by adapting Seidman's three-part, in-depth phenomenological interview approach (Seidman, 2019). According to Seidman (2019), "interviewing ... is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (p. 8).

There are four rationales for Seidman's three-part structure of phenomenological interviewing (2019). First, experiences are ephemeral and bound in time. Second, the researcher can only aim to come as close as possible to understanding how participants experience something subjectively. Third, the participants' accounts are reconstructed and reconstituted through the guidance of the interviewer, drawing upon the language of both, and then transformed into a textual account by the researcher. Fourth, the creation of meaning occurs as a collaborative act between researcher and participant. These rationales are the basis for the three parts of the phenomenological interview process, which elicit information on

1. focused life history,
2. details of lived experience, and
3. reflection on the meaning of that experience.

For this project, I adapted Seidman's (2019) three-interview series into two semi-structured interviews with each participant. For the first interview, I started with talking story or catching up with the participant if it was someone I knew through professional or graduate

school circles. I asked the participant to choose a pseudonym, and then offered to answer any questions they might have about the research process before we delved into interview questions.

Next, I started by reading out loud their definition of SJE from the survey, and then invited them to elaborate on their definition if they wanted to. Then, I asked when they first started thinking about social justice in their work as educators. Afterwards, I asked them to share a life history detailing their background, upbringing, and education with a focus on experiences that may have shaped their social justice orientation. Before wrapping up the first interview, I also scheduled the second interview. In the second interview, I asked participants to describe a particular unit, lesson, or experience they had implemented that related to social justice. I invited them to talk about in detail how the experience came about, how it felt to them at the time, and what it meant to them in retrospect.

It is not important to the phenomenologist how one interview is the same or different from another (Vagle, 2014, p. 79). While most of the interviews followed a similar structure, not all interviews were alike in questions or length. Throughout the interview process, I maintained a balance between consistency and flexibility. The flexible, semi-structured nature of the interview protocol allowed me to ask many follow-up and clarifying questions. I often summarized and recast the participants' accounts in my own words and asked for clarification or verification of my understandings. This helped me avoid making assumptions or misunderstanding something they said. It also allowed me to gather more information in areas that seemed of particular relevance or resonance in that conversation.

I conducted almost all interviews on Zoom though a few participants asked to meet in person instead. With the participants' permission, I audio-recorded all interviews using Zoom,

Otter.ai, and/or my phone, in order to have backup recordings for further clarification or to guard against accidental loss or poor sound quality. I used Otter.ai to automatically transcribe each interview. In some cases, I used the Otter.ai tool live, during the interview itself, and in other cases, I uploaded the audio file into the Otter.ai program to obtain the transcript. After each interview, I reviewed and edited the Otter.ai transcripts for accuracy while listening to the recordings, also parsing the text for easier reading. During this transcription process, I wrote memos along the way as a way to record initial impressions and any questions I had. For each participant, I finished checking the transcript for the first interview before proceeding with the second interview, so I could use the second interview to verify my understanding or ask any questions that may have come up during the transcription of the first interview.

Data Analysis

Coding is a process by which the researcher attends to the data, focusing attention on what matters, identifying patterns, shapes, resonances, or coherences across the data. It is also a process of naming, and possibly renaming, the emerging elements (Vanover et al., 2022). I chose to use terms like “generated” or “identified” when talking about themes or sub-themes, to emphasize that data analysis is an active and subjective process, and that themes do not emerge by themselves. Even before starting to code with the software tool MaxQDA, I found myself noticing patterns and constructing meaning as I checked and organized the transcripts. Throughout the subsequent rounds of coding, I also engaged in naming, renaming, reorganizing, questioning, and re-evaluating the elements which struck me as being important within the analysis. While the process in reality was non-linear, iterative, and quite messy, Table 2 maps out the major cycles of data organization and interpretation I engaged in for analyzing the data.

The research questions guided the iterative process of organizing and analyzing the data. I examined each transcript after the interview, at least once each, for accuracy and completeness, adding notes as I read to record questions, wonderings, and initial impressions. I kept these comments in the transcript files so I could continue to respond to or explore these thoughts during subsequent rounds of coding.

Next, I organized the data based on the types of information I had. This step of organizing the data helped me complete a table of participant information, and an organizational system within MaxQDA with a folder for each participant containing the survey responses, the interview transcripts, and any other contextual information they shared. This process highlighted the fact that the types and quantity of contextual data for each participant varied greatly, but I also had plentiful and consistent survey and interview data for every participant who had completed both interviews. As such, I decided to focus my attention on coding the interview and survey data, with the flexibility of drawing on contextual data where available and if necessary. After organizing the data into folders by participant, I labeled each document by type: survey response, interview 1 transcript, interview 2 transcript, syllabus, student work sample, and so on. This step also deepened my level of familiarity with the data from each individual participant.

Next, I began to identify segments according to the research questions of how participants defined and conceptualized SJE, and what factors shaped their thinking around SJE. I read through all the interview data again, one participant at a time, marking the segments of conversation that I felt were related to or would help me more fully understand what participants were sharing about these two research questions.

After these initial rounds of organizing, labeling, and familiarizing myself with the

information I had gathered, I explored the data in more structured ways through at least three subsequent explorations, sometimes taking breaks to read or write other parts of my dissertation, allowing myself to step away, process, and then come back to the data when necessary. In these three separate explorations, I looked at:

1. definitions of SJE from all 40 survey responses,
2. definitions and conceptualizations of SJE from 34 interview transcripts,
3. factors that shaped participants' thinking around SJE from 34 interview transcripts.

The first exploration gave me a broad view of how all respondents to the survey defined SJE. I coded in iterative fashion, starting with an openness to marking everything that seemed significant so I ended up with a large number of codes, including many that may only have occurred once. This was an application of horizontalization, where everything starts on the same horizon line at first examination. After this initial coding for the definition question, I re-examined the coded segments to see how they related to each other, and how many may have stemmed from similar ideas or themes. I repeated the process of comparing codes to possible themes, adjusting the themes as I went. At the end of this exploration, I ended up with five themes about how the survey respondents defined SJE.

The second exploration of data was a closer look at the transcripts of the interviews with the 17 participants, during which I read out the survey responses on how each participant defined SJE, and invited them to talk about these definitions in greater detail. In the process of interviewing them about their life history and teaching experiences, we often talked about things that I thought might be related to their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE, which I marked in MaxQDA. While I did not want to go into this exploration with the assumption that the five

themes identified from the surveys would still be of primary importance in the interview data, I kept the themes in mind while also staying open to the possibility of new ideas becoming more important. I stayed open to everything of possible significance by treating all of the ideas as existing on the same horizon line at the beginning. I repeated the process of coding, comparing, and adjusting the codes until I generated clear themes. What I found was that in my deeper dive into interview data, which contained not just definitions but more details about examples and experiences that led participants to define SJE in certain ways, some of the five themes, or things that were subsumed under one of the five themes, came closer to the surface, and constituted more of the conversations I had with participants.

Table 2.*Data Exploration Process*

Data Exploration	
Steps	Task
Reviewed transcripts after each interview	Listened to recorded interview while reading the transcripts to edit, parse, and verify accuracy. Listed follow-up questions for participant. Added notes about any wonderings or observations about the data.
Organized data	Created folders in MaxQDA for each participant and uploaded participants' survey response, interview transcripts, and other contextual information to corresponding folders.
Marked segments relevant to research questions	Using the research questions as a guide, I coded any survey or transcript segments that may respond directly or indirectly to the research questions.
Coded survey responses on SJE definitions	Extracting the survey responses to the question of how participants define SJE, I performed iterative coding to identify categories and their relationships to each other.
Coded interview responses on SJE definitions and conceptualizations	Extracting the interview responses around SJE definitions and conceptualizations, I performed iterative coding to identify categories and their relationships to each other.
Coded interview responses for factors that shaped participants' thinking around SJE	Extracting the interview responses around factors that shaped participants' thinking around SJE, I performed iterative coding to identify categories and their relationships to each other.

Overview of Data

All participants met the criteria of being a K-12 educator in Hawai‘i, and self-identifying as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in their work as educators. I received 40 responses to the survey and used the survey data to strategically select educators for the next step of data collection, the interviews. I approached participants with the goal of eliciting diverse perspectives from participants based on:

1. types of school (public, charter, private, religious),
2. grades taught (elementary, middle, secondary),
3. number of years of teaching in Hawai‘i,
4. relationship to Hawai‘i (in terms of upbringing, community, education, career).

My data ultimately drew upon 40 survey responses and 34 interviews (17 educators, 2 interviews each), along with contextual data they shared with me. The contextual data varied from participant to participant, and included syllabi, instructional materials, readings that influenced their own thinking, readings assigned to students, samples of student work, publicly available information about their teaching or advocacy, or publicly available information about their schools. I spoke with 19 different participants in total, two of whom did not complete a second interview. After repeated attempts to schedule a second interview with these two participants, I proceeded to analyze the data for the 17 participants who had completed both interviews.

Overview of Participants

Out of the 17 participants who completed both interviews, nine identified as female, and eight as male. Fifteen teachers taught on O‘ahu, one on Hawai‘i island, and one on Maui. Nine teachers were born and raised in Hawai‘i, while the other eight settled here for a variety of

reasons. Seven are transplant teachers in the sense that they moved to Hawai‘i to teach, or accepted a Teach For America posting to Hawai‘i, and one moved here with family as a young adult and later became a teacher. Out of 17 participants, four became teachers through Teach For America.

Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of participants with regard to gender, location, role, grades served, and school type. Table 3 lists details about the 17 participants who completed both interviews, organized alphabetically by pseudonym. At the time of the interviews in the summer of 2022, two of the participants had already decided to leave their teaching positions in Hawai‘i. Eleven participants were full-time classroom teachers; two had hybrid teaching and administrative or research roles, while four had non-classroom roles within a school like educational specialist, English language learner coordinator, librarian, or strategic planner. Four participants served in elementary schools, three in middle schools, nine taught in high schools, and one served a K-12 population. Six of the participants worked in private schools. Among the 11 teachers who taught in public schools, four taught in charter schools. The survey did not contain a question about sexual orientation, but during the interviews, four participants voluntarily shared that they identified as LGBTQ+.

Figure 2.

Participant Gender, Location, Roles, Grades, and School Types

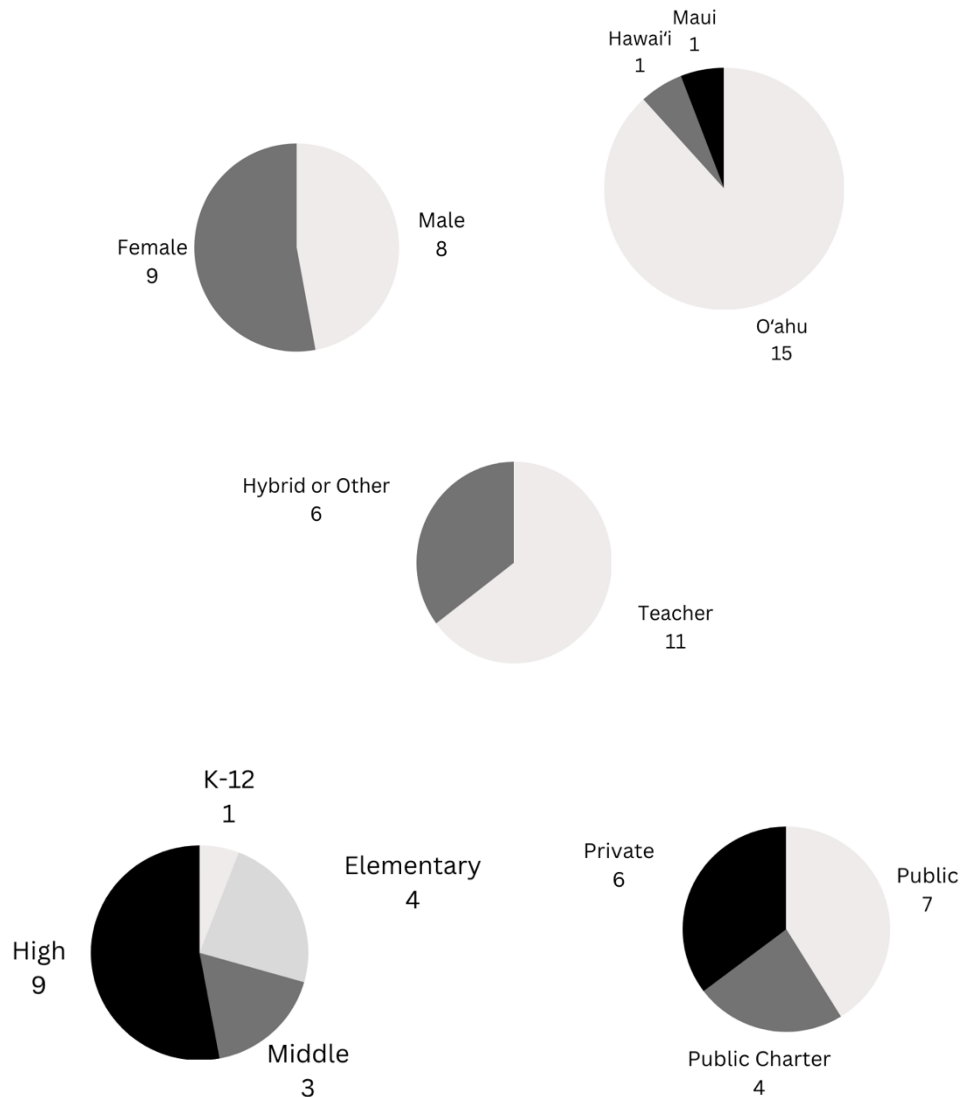


Table 3.*Overview of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Professional Role/Title	Subject or Discipline	Grades	School Location	Type of School	Years teaching (HI/overall)
Ahuli'i	32	Librarian	-	Elementary	Honolulu	Private	9/9
Alex	24	Teacher	ELA, social studies	Middle	Honolulu	Public Charter	3/3
Arita	45	Teacher, Admin	Science	Middle	Honolulu	Public Charter	18/18
Jen	38	Teacher	General	Elementary	Honolulu	Public Charter	7/13*
Joanie	43	Teacher	Math	High	Kahului, Maui	Public	18/19
Juan	39	Teacher	Science	High	Honolulu	Public	8/8
Lemon	37	Teacher	Science	High	Hilo, Hawai'i	Public	12/12
Matt	46	Teacher	English	High	Honolulu	Private	5/24
Mei	37	Design Specialist	Science	K-12	Honolulu	Private, Religious	11/11
Naoko	40	Teacher	General	Elementary	Leeward coast, O'ahu	Public	9/9
Pedro	31	School Strategic Planner	-	High	Honolulu	Public	9/9
Punana	46	Teacher	Social Studies	High	Honolulu	Private	18/18
Quang	41	Teacher	English	High	Honolulu	Private	5/17
Russell	40	Teacher	World Languages	High	'Ewa District, O'ahu	Public	8/10
Steve	41	ELL Coordinator	-	High	'Ewa District, O'ahu	Public	14/14
Ulu	29	Teacher	Science	Middle	Leeward coast, O'ahu	Public	7/7
Valerie	44	Teacher/Teacher Scholar	General	Elementary	Honolulu	Private	1/19*

* no longer teaching in Hawai'i

Member Checking

As stated above, my intention with this study was to honor the voices and experiences of participants around SJE, keeping in mind that I have an obligation to consider what is at stake for them, and how this study might potentially benefit them, their work, and their communities. I recorded each interview and checked the transcripts for accuracy, then contacted the participants again to schedule a second interview, when I sometimes asked follow-up questions to clarify their responses from the first interview. At times, the process of clarification and verification involved follow-up questions via email to the participants. After writing a first draft of Chapter 4, I sent the draft to the 17 interviewed participants to review. In my member checking request, I asked them if they felt I had interpreted and represented their words and experiences accurately, and if they felt comfortable with the level of privacy I had provided in my writing. All 17 participants responded in the affirmative. One participant had reflected on her previous year of teaching since we spoke, and shared additional information via email that she felt was relevant to our conversation, which I incorporated. Another participant asked me to edit out some instances of the word “like” in the block quotes from her interviews, as she felt it came up too often in her speech. After significant revisions to the first draft of Chapter 4 where I incorporated more of the participants’ words and wrote about the themes with greater specificity, I sent Chapter 4 to all 17 interviewed participants again for another round of member checking, asking them again to let me know if they felt comfortable with my interpretations, representations, and provisions of privacy for their contributions.

Conclusion

This qualitative, constructivist study explored the lived experiences of K-12 educators in

Hawai‘i who self-identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in their work as educators, through their words, stories, and lived experiences. I focused on the knowledge and experiences from participants’ interactions, perceptions, and memories of the phenomenon of SJE. In particular, I drew on elements of Indigenized phenomenology and IPA because of how these approaches align with the settler colonial theoretical framework. After exploring my positionality and relationships to important aspects of this study, I described the processes of participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and member checking. I also provided an overview of the data and participants. The following chapter presents the findings around what shaped participants’ orientation towards SJE and how they now define SJE in their work as educators.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In order to explore the factors that shaped K-12 educators' orientations towards SJE, and their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE in their current work as educators, I applied a hybrid phenomenological approach that aligned with the theoretical framework of settler colonialism. After exploring my positionality in terms of my relationships to Hawai'i, SJE, and the participants, I surveyed and interviewed K-12 educators in Hawai'i who self-identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation. Through iterative analysis of survey data (from 40 participants) and interview data (34 interviews with 17 participants), I generated themes and sub-themes to answer the two research questions above. While the overall structure of this chapter is thematic, there are times when the presentation of participant quotes have a narrative quality, which preserves the important contexts of what they were sharing and the storied nature of people speaking about their experiences. This choice, to preserve and convey how participants told their stories and the details they chose to share, is consistent with the adapted phenomenological approach I have applied for this study, one that values the contextualized, situated nature of experience. Also, I chose to include lengthier quotes in many cases because they exemplified and added complexity to the themes and sub-themes. I organized the themes and sub-themes by how they address my research questions on the experiences that shaped participants' orientation toward social justice education (SJE) and their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE in their current work as educators.

What Experiences Shaped Participants' Orientations Towards Social Justice Education?

My first research question looked at the past and ongoing experiences that shaped participants' thinking about SJE, which I generated from the interviews with 17 participants.

Since I asked participants to share a detailed life history with regards to what shaped their orientation towards SJE, participants provided expansive, narrative responses that included details about their childhood, families, education, beliefs, professional experiences, identities, and ongoing learning and thinking.

On initial examination of this rich body of data, it was apparent that there were some convergences in their experiences. For example, many talked about having an internal sense of right and wrong, personal experiences or observations of injustice, and negative or positive school experiences, many of which had a connection with aspects of their identity (e.g. race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, or sexual orientation). Taking a step towards making non-obvious, “critical, in-depth” (Bhattacharya, 2019) thematic statements about this data, I generated the following themes and sub-themes around the experiences that shaped participants’ thinking about social justice education:

Table 4.

Themes and Sub-Themes on Experiences that Shaped Participants' Orientation Towards SJE

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Situated, Relational Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationships to Place ● Relationships to People
2. Erasure or Devaluation of Identities, Cultures, and Histories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of Diversity ● Segregation ● Assimilation ● Erasure or Devaluation ● Curricular Gaps
3. Complex Conscientization Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seeking It Out ● Reflecting on Past Experiences Through More Recently Acquired Awareness ● Seeing Systems ● Formative Schooling Experiences ● Formative Professional Experiences
4. SJ Educator Identity as a Response to Lived Experiences	

The following sections provide participants' words that speak to each of these themes.

Situated, Relational Identities

Many participants spoke about parts of their identity when speaking in detail about the experiences that shaped their SJE thinking. In particular, they spoke about relationships to Hawai'i as part of their identity, or awareness of their roles, responsibilities, and impacts in Hawai'i, in the context of their social justice consciousness.

I did always, even though like I, you know, I guess being Hawaiian, growing up in Hawai'i, I always thought of myself as a Hawaiian first... because I was growing up here and, like, surrounded by my Hawaiian family, yeah, that was my identity. And I always knew it. And like, in elementary school, I was always, like, very excited when we did Hawaiian things or Hawaiian studies, or Makahiki was always my favorite thing. Yeah. Like, I looked forward to it. It was so fun to me. (Ahuli'i)

I would always go back and forth between Hawai'i and here. But even when I lived in ____ (name of country), we were also, me, my sister, and my mom were just known as like the Hawai'i girls. And that was always like a core part of my identity. (Ulu)

I did not grow up even understanding Japanese culture very well. You know, like for me, all I know is Hawai'i. And so I think that might be part of the reason I was so interested in Hawaiian culture, it's because this is where I was born, and I was trying to maybe assimilate to being from Hawai'i. (Joanie)

Mei spoke about how her “cultural awakening” led her to wanting to know more about the place where she grew up, and to change her relationship to place:

It was during, my own awakening, my cultural awakening, it was, it was really reading Haunani-Kay Trask that really gave me, I think, a schema that made me start to see connections where I didn't before. And then from there, it was just me wanting to know more about the places that I was working, visiting. And also led to me wanting to learn

more about, you know, the place that I grew up, which I didn't have a great relationship with at all. (Mei)

Lemon spoke about swallowing her pride to return to Hawai'i for graduate school but now considers it "the best decision that I ever made," because "this is what I love to do. I love to connect place, I love to connect science, and I love kids."

The participants quoted above all described a connection to Hawai'i, though they may have experienced it in different ways. Some participants talked about developing more complex ideas around their identities and balancing different aspects of their identities, which were also informed by varied relationships to Hawai'i, like immigrant or settler status, in relation to historical contexts. For Joanie, becoming aware of Asian settler roles in the history of Hawai'i changed how she thought of herself and her role as a social justice educator.

But what I've learned, and what I've gotten more comfortable saying to people, is, like, the role of Japanese people, and me being Japanese, and coming from that background where like I've had, ...just the role of, like, the Japanese people in, like, the overthrow and all of that, right, and how they just came in, and was like, Well, yeah, we're all for America. It's like whoa, what about these people that, you know, just lost their land, and their language, and their culture? ...I kind of have to find my role. And I feel like my role is like telling people who look like me, like, hey, back up, you know, like, this is what we need to be focusing on. And we all need to be advocating for better, you know, Hawaiian education resources, for better opportunities for Hawaiian students and families. Right. So yeah, that's kinda like the role that I've taken, I guess. (Joanie)

Russell, who moved to Hawai'i to continue teaching, spoke about his awareness of not being Hawaiian and from Hawai'i. He described how he enters conversations here, always being aware of "how to show up and how much to show up." He also talked about his choice to not contribute to the loss or erasure of Hawaiian language and ways of knowing and being in his classroom.

I'm bringing something, moving here, bringing something different than what is you know, native and indigenous to this place, and I have to be aware of that, if I want to make sure that I do my part and you know, maintaining who I am, but also, not only maintaining, but also to help perpetuate the culture, the ways of being in ways of knowing of this place. I could, I always see it as I could be one more space in Hawaii, where either the Hawaiian language culture and ways of knowing and being dies, or I can be a space or place where all of that can live and continue on. And so, I choose, actively choose to be the latter. (Russell)

Some participants spoke about experiencing racism or being othered for the first time while studying away from Hawai'i. They spoke about how these experiences with their own identities, in the context of being in largely White culture, honed their sense of connection to Hawai'i, aspects of their identities, and their social justice consciousness.

I just hung out with like all the athletes, all the brown peeps, and it was, it was super interesting to have a bigger scope of seeing people that weren't just from Hawai'i. And like we had international students from like Congo, like, it was nuts, just seeing, like, the huge difference in people's experiences. And I think college was the first time I really like experienced hardcore racism. And like also, that's where like the first wave of Black

Lives Matter, like, kind of hit, and also when the first big wave of, like, Mauna Kea, the TMT hit. So it was just like a very eye-opening time in my life where I was like, okay, like there's so much injustice in the world. And I'm here to learn about it. And I'm here to, like, figure out what part I want to take in, in this, in the world, I guess. (Ulu)

That's where I got to first meet, like, you know, like some racist stuff in the mainland, people thinking I was a Mexican ... but it was one of the first times where I was like, opportunity where, like, man, I am a minority, because when it flips, right? When you go to the mainland, I definitely was like, I'm so used to being in the majority, but now I'm the minority ... I think it was like, it was my first opportunity to meet African-Americans and Mexicans, because we don't have a bunch of them in here. And I spent a whole semester with them and we took care of each other. They took care of me, they were great ... it was definitely a life changing experience over there. Um, just being with other peoples of color and just, and my circumstances were so much more privileged than they were, you know, this was like first immigrant groups. First families [who] have gone to college, right. My, my family's got grad degrees, both got graduate degrees, so. (Punana)

I was living in Pennsylvania for those four years and it sucked really badly. I really hated my entire time at _____ (university name), however I'm very thankful for what the college and the network has provided me in terms of, just, access to privilege, access to seeing what wealth is like, but at the same time feeling very much othered in that situation ... in my last semester of college, I would be student teaching, so I just wasn't

even on campus anymore. I was off campus, working in a White suburban, White suburban, upper crust, high school. And so I really lost touch with most of my classmates by that point. So I felt very other, I just didn't want to be there, and eventually didn't even attend commencement. Because I felt so different, and I just didn't want to be around all that Whiteness. (Lemon)

Part of experiencing identity and lack of representation was through the experiences of other people. Lemon also spoke of her interactions with the few Asian students where she student taught, and her observations about how they saw her, and how their experiences with schooling were different from her own:

One thing that really stuck with me from that experience is that it was the first time ... not seeing any teacher that looked like me, it was entirely a White faculty. And I guess you know, I'd been in college for a while, so I was getting familiar with White spaces. But it was weird, because on lunch breaks, I would just see Asian kids just like stop in, or stare at me, or look at me or want to hang out and talk story. And I just couldn't understand why because I think that my adjacency to Whiteness already had been so, so easily come by that I didn't know what was happening in maybe the first two months, but then I realized it and tried to become a little more welcoming in that space for the, for the last three [months]. And then, when I talked about that, the Asian population, being like five kids, right, it's not even enough to make a club, we just, just gonna hang out. And we did, but then it was also like I didn't have, I didn't share the experiences with them because they grew up in the continent, and I didn't. So that being said, I left and I didn't really, I

don't talk to them now. But it was, it was one of those first times that, like, it really kind of just shook me. (Lemon)

When Lemon went to Washington, D.C. to accept a national educator award in 2022, she had another experience that reinforced her minority status, which brought back feelings from her student teaching experience.

Then there's so many other teachers who came up to me, who are other teachers ... across the nation, who came up to me, who are Asian, of Asian descent, and they're like, thank you so much for being there. Like it was so nice to see someone with an Asian last name being in a public sphere, and public space, and see someone that looks like me. I'm just like, okay, I didn't think about it because everybody looks at me here like I am the face of triggering emotions in Hawai'i. So like, I want to be seen as Asian, but it's, it's now entirely different on the continent, there is this sense of pride, that was a 2% population of AAPI teachers ... It's like, oh, so we do exist. So this idea of existence within a predominantly White structure. And then they started sharing their stories with me, like, I've never, I never had an Asian teacher, or to see someone like, this representation. It really emotionally got to me, like I was now having to hold a lot of people's stories of representation that I didn't have immediate connection to, except for that one instance, when I was student teaching, so I had to access back that feeling of trauma. I had suppressed that for so long, until this point where I was back in a White space and oh, damn, that actually does happen. So like that suppression of that feeling that I had earlier, I didn't know was going to transform me the way that it did until very recently, when I had to unpack it again. (Lemon)

For Lemon and Punana, being away deepened their appreciation for Hawai‘i.

Um, I went away to ____ (name of college) for football for a semester in ____, California, that didn't work out. I got homesick. (Punana)

I think that just being away for just a little while makes you appreciate so much more ...

And that is something that I quickly saw when I was in Pennsylvania, like, I can lose, I can lose the connection to Hawai‘i, I can lose the culture. Because in high school, I would be the first person to be driving across the Saddle Road and my dad, like, what mountain is that? And I'm like, I don't care. I'm not going to live here. I'm not going to be here. And the moment that I left, I was like, oh yeah, what mountain was that? How did I become the ambassador of Hawai‘i in Pennsylvania and then not know, like, how embarrassing that I didn't know all of these things that my parents constantly tried to drill into me. And that just like, oh shit, I can lose all this. And so I made it a point to never lose it again. (Lemon)

Participants also spoke about how relationships with family members shaped their consciousness around social justice. In these cases, it was clear that conversations, modeling, or examples, were part of longer term experiences through which participants acquired certain ideas or ways of thinking that related to SJE. For example, in learning about some past family traumas, Ahuli‘i better understood the way her parents treated others:

Knowing that, you know, trauma is around you, you know, my mom was always, my dad too... approach things with empathy, approach people as if, you know, they've, you don't know what someone has gone through. So you know, be careful how you interact with

them. And you know, how you approach them. And I always really did take that to heart, like, being thoughtful with your speech and being thoughtful with your action. (Ahuli'i)

My idea of social justice started out pretty young. We, my mom was a professional volleyball player. My dad was a professional basketball player. And my mom always instilled in us to, like, give back to the community no matter where you are. (Ulu)

In some cases, participants reflected on lessons from family members which later invoked deeper thinking around complex issues of identity, education, and relationships to place.

I was pretty much you know, primarily with my grandmother, as I was growing up, and so I was fully bought in to her idea of like, assimilation is good. This is how we, you know, we beat poverty. This is how you, like, don't get stuck in the same crappy relationships that other people do. I mean, she has many, many stories that I think were a source of trauma for me. So she was very much like, Yeah, we don't need [Hawaiian] culture, but she also didn't disentangle culture from, I don't know what else she would call it, like, her Americanness. I'm also seeing a lot of like, her core teachings were very much rooted in Hawaiian values and understandings, but she would teach them in English, and they would be a way for me to, like, achieve in school or to achieve some kind of what she thought was success, which was financial stability as an individual woman, because she had been married, multiple times, multiple abusive relationships. And so her direct teaching was, you don't need a man to succeed. Always have your own bank account that your husband doesn't know about. (Mei)

Mei described extended conversations with her husband about social justice issues as a conscientizing force in her “cultural awakening.” This affected her views on her religion as well as broader value judgements she had held about herself and others.

I was a really, really good Mormon until the moment that I decided no, and then I completely distanced myself from the entire community, and denounced all the things, and was done with it. But that point, I think came after a lot of discussion with my now husband, who has a really strong background in ethnic studies, religious studies, social justice. And so he pushed me to think about things differently ... My husband now just had so many books that he was like, read this, that was good. Read this one, read this one, read this. And it took, it took a lot for me to deconstruct my previous worldviews and like a ton of conversation with him, and with his magical ability to like map out my entire argument, and then tear it down, piece by piece. (Mei)

Juan spoke about his disidentification with Filipino identity, and the loss he experienced around this especially with regards to his family:

What happened was, I disidentified, I say, oh yeah, I, and it, and the thing is, you don't have the language for it. So you just kind of say, I'm not going to associate with the Filipinos. You know, like I'm not even gonna explore. Like I don't, you know, I'm, I'm not gonna, I, I didn't want to learn about Philippines. I didn't want to learn, you know, in many ways then, then it exacerbated, like, I didn't speak to my parents, my mom, about her life experience, my grandpa, like when my grandpa was alive. Now I want to speak to him like every day, but he's passed away. And so like, I, I can't get his stories, but, you know, but, like at the time, like, I guess it wasn't as painful because you just kind of

trying to survive, right. You're just kinda like, I don't, you don't know what you're going through. You just like, oh, Filipinos are not being treated well, I'm not Filipino then.

(Juan)

Arita spoke about some complexities of identity that she observed with intersections of ethnicity and socioeconomic class within her family:

So Filipino was only even like my street cred. I wasn't embarrassed to be it. But I wasn't like, my family wasn't gardeners or janitors, you know? So I did, we had already achieved something. We have, we had settled and assimilated, then some of the other ones, and then even, like, my partner, his family is from the Philippines, but they think it's so cool. Like they had a totally different experience. But they were like wealthy. They were from Chicago to Hawai'i. So their experience ... they're not even plantation. They have no concept of the plantation or workers even. They're not from the working class of the Philippines. (Arita)

The varied quotes shared above reinforce the importance and complexity of relationships to place and people in participant identities and how they experienced justice.

Erasure or Devaluation of Identities, Cultures, and Histories

Participants spoke about a range of ways in which they experienced the devaluation of aspects of identity or culture as something that honed their SJE consciousness. This included the lack of diversity or representation of diverse identities, unsafe or neglectful environments for marginalized identities, or outright segregation. Some spoke about not having the words or knowledge to talk about their own identities, or learning about curricular gaps in their education later in life. Most of these experiences were in educational contexts.

Lack of Diversity. When talking about their life histories in the context of social justice consciousness, a few participants pointed out the lack of diversity in their early schooling.

To be honest, like growing up, where I grew up in my experiences in like, K through 12 school. There's not a lot of diversity in the schools that I went to like, mostly White kids, mostly Catholic too, I mean, mostly not a lot of like, religious diversity, I guess. (Steve)

I think I have always been interested in equity issues and diversity issues. I went to a very small private school in North Central Florida in a very segregated place. There were, I want to say, four or five students of color in my entire school, all of whom I befriended. I think just as, as a, as a conduit to, to not feeling comfortable in that majority culture. And so, yeah, I think I projected my sense of feeling like an outsider onto, onto other people who similarly felt alienated and ostracized. So, I think that's been pretty consistent for me throughout. (Matt)

It's a very, very White dominated school, I think, you know, you could count on two hands, the number of like, yeah, people of color that were in our classes. So it was yeah, it was just a, it was a very closed environment. I think a lot of people got away with stuff that they wouldn't have if it was more diverse and had a stronger voice from teachers as well. (Alex)

Segregation. Russell spoke about the foundational impact on him as he understood more about why he attended a school an hour away instead of the school right across the street from his home.

Oh, we went to the school for, you know, the Black kids. And then right across the street was the school where all the White people went, you know. And growing up, I really didn't think much of that, other than we all recognize that this is where the White kids go, and this is where the Black kids go. But when I grew up, and I started learning about how, you know, zoning and redlining, and all these political things happened, I started to realize, like, we totally should have gone to that school, we could have, like, [a] five-minute walk to school every day as opposed to, like, [an] hour on the bus. But um, (sigh) yeah, so that, that I guess, if I think about it, could have had a, you know, foundational impact on me. Just, you know, recognizing that on some level. (Russell)

Assimilation. Many participants described the pressure to assimilate into dominant culture, language, beliefs, or identities as something that also led to a loss or devaluation of their own identities. Some spoke of assimilation as an obstacle to seeing the impact of one's own ethnic group on others.

I just didn't understand this, this loss that was happening. Like we just, like, want to be American and, and local, right. This pan-ethnic identity, right. Like, I'm local, I'm not them. And I, I went through that. My sister's still like, just, she's really proud of this American identity, you know? And I'm like, do we even know? I mean, like, and it's okay, like, do we even know, like, the history of America and the United States and this colonization, and this really, this, this, um, Americanization of their [Filipino] school system? And so, all these people that went through that school system and left, through the diaspora, brought those ideologies with them, which my mom went through, she was born in 1954. And so she went through an American education in the Philippines. And so,

she brought a lot of the ideologies to us. And so, it could have exacerbated why she didn't teach us about Filipino [things] because they were taught being Filipino, where she was in her schooling, was not good, right. American is the way to go. And so, when they all left, like, you know, go join the military and American, American's the way, you know. (Juan)

For example, my grandma will probably never get it. You know, people of my grandma's generation, even like my parents' generation, are so proud to be American, right? Like they had to, like, and that's okay, so there's so much to this, but like, they, they had this like, allegiance, like they wanted to be American, and now I'm thinking about, like, why? (Joanie)

So, I'm no longer associated with Christianity, or the church that I grew up in. But the lessons were very much like, God brought the gospel to the U.S. and then to places outside of the U.S. as, like, the fullness of the way to live and be, and so all of your, you know, cultural beliefs, those, you don't need those for life, to live a good life. You need to assimilate, and the word assimilation wasn't ever used, but it was, you had to look a certain way or dress a certain way, and success was very much defined as ability to contribute to the church. (Mei)

Erasure or Devaluation. Participants spoke about their own experiences where they felt erasure, devaluation, or disconnection from their own identities, or the devaluation of other identities, as part of what formed their SJE consciousness.

I (sighs) don't know how to explain it. It's like, I just, I didn't have a sense of identity at all. It's like, who am I? Like, I don't even know who I am. (Juan)

My dad's half Chinese, he's very, he says, I'm White and he makes fun of Chinese people. It's very bizarre to me. (Jen)

Ulu observed and experienced prejudiced statements and ideas towards Micronesians, with whom she shared ESL (English as a Second Language) courses, because she began her elementary education in another country. She described:

... people judging me for hanging out with them. They were like, eww, why are you with them? ... And then also just, like, just hearing, like, people saying we hate Micronesians. Like, I just didn't understand ... and I was just, like, so confused. And [it] was like, why ... why are you in class with them? You're smarter than them. They're dumb. They don't know. They don't value education ... I even heard from like adults ... like, oh, their culture doesn't value education ... So it was just a very eye opening experience where I was like, these are my friends. Like, what's wrong? ... It's not even about them. It's about, like, what race they are, and just racism. (Ulu)

Alex described an experience where his school decided not to support LGBTQ+ students by allowing the formation of a student club.

But it was getting around the school, like lots of rumors were being passed around that, like, there was a group of freshmen that were queer identifying and were, like, doing self harm, and kept on going to this one younger teacher who was known to be kind of like a big ally to LGBT kids. And it got brought, it was a big enough issue that it got brought to

the administration's attention and we wanted to start an official school GSA, and basically, we, the school decided they didn't want to, they didn't want to make it and upset all the parents. So they held a parent forum about it, and that parent forum, basically, they just let all of the super, super conservative parents come forward, and unleash their wrath upon the, the forum, and say how horrible and heinous it would be to have the school support these kids, and that if they're going through hard times, they need to like seek out God, or, or therapy or something like that to, to help deal with it. But whatever the current situation is, is how it should stay, kind of like in the background. So being one of the older students who was also like, gay, I was like, oh, my god, I can't believe this is happening in such a blatantly, like, hateful way, and I think, so just yeah, lots and lots of like, very negative experiences dealing with, you know, pushing for diversity and, and that being answered with no, like, not here, that's, this is not a place where we engage with these ideas or identities. (Alex)

In Mei's case, being Hawaiian at a school for Hawaiian students was confusing because she was told to be proud to be Hawaiian, while getting messages that she should not pursue Hawaiian language and culture in her studies.

And so that was really, that was really confusing and complex... And then they would, they would tell us superficially to be proud to be Hawaiian. But it was hollow, I feel like, in a lot of ways, because the subtext was always, or at least in my experience ... don't take Hawaiian. That's not something that's going to be useful to you. As far as electives go, like, don't choose to be in Hawaiian ensemble, which is the hula halau. Don't do that. Like, this is what a college is going to want to see. And this is the type of scholarships

you should try to get, and you're gonna get that by doing things that show up on paper as legible to a mainland audience. And so, you know, take orchestra, take marching band, that's great. But I was explicitly told not to follow cultural paths in high school. And I was like, I just took it. I was like, Yeah, okay, that makes total sense. I get it. That's also what my family says. So, I get it, let's not waste our time on things that are not going to help us succeed in college and beyond. (Mei)

Joanie had a similar experience when she expressed an interest in studying Hawaiian language in high school:

I actually wanted to take Hawaiian language, but I was always told oh, if you're gonna go to a school in the, on the continent ... you know, you probably don't want to take Hawaiian, like, take something else. So, I took Spanish. (Joanie)

Mei also began to question her religious identity when she started to feel devalued as a woman. Having once been a self-described “good Mormon girl,” she started making a mental list of things from church or her religious college that did not feel right to her.

Then as a woman, or as a girl growing up in the church, it was overtly or explicitly taught that our success in life would be in terms of marriage, and motherhood, and service. And growing up, even education, we were taught that too much education was bad, because it distances you from faith and from the church. And that you would need to get enough education so that you could be a good teacher to your children. And that your education could be a backup to if you ever needed to get a job, if your husband couldn't work, or died, or you know, was incapable, because of some kind of ailment, but it was always a backup, it was never do this for the sake of like learning, growing, being all that you can

be, because all you could be was mother, wife. Even when I was in college, in the 2000s, we would have full, full school presentations about how we, as women in a college setting, if we got pregnant, because we were married, that it was totally fine for us to quit school, and that they encouraged us to do so. And that we didn't need graduate school, because our purpose being at this college was to get married. (Mei)

She also experienced tension between family experiences and church perspectives around gendered and sexual violence.

I got older and started witnessing, like, my friends, my female friends experiencing sexual violence, and the reaction that the church or the school even had to those events, where I was like, this is, this is absolutely, this cannot be what God would want. And so those were, I think those are the biggest places where I was like, the one thing that I know, growing up from my family, that I thought was a productive lesson, was that you don't, you don't stay in abusive relationships. You don't let somebody beat you up. (Mei)

Alex described an unsafe school environment where he experienced anti-Semitism and homophobia, in addition to students responding in "horrible" ways to learning about the Civil War or the Holocaust.

I think it was just hearing kind of bigoted comments about things that my family viewed as being completely okay. Like, you know, that was the first time I ever experienced anti-Semitism in middle school, was people like saying horrible things about Jewish people and, and that was also like a time where I was trying to figure out like my sexuality and, and so there was a lot of homophobia from teachers, and from students, and yeah, it was kind of just this very, like tense atmosphere for me, of having to feel like I had to, like,

shelter a part of who I was, and, you know, get through the day to day... I think other kids also just, as they grew up, became, yeah, more, more close-minded, I guess, you know, the more, more you learn about history, I mean, I could, like, go through so many stories of, like, horrible things that happened as we were learning about different topics at school, like, in eighth grade, we learned about the Civil War. And there was a group of boys who had run through the halls singing “the South should have won, the South should have won,” or things like that. And we got to high school and learning about the Holocaust. And that's when all of the Holocaust jokes started. So, you know, it's like, one by.... It was a domino effect of, as everybody became more quote, unquote, worldly, they were also able to access all these different points through which to make horrible jokes or deepen their already, like, sort of conservative or pessimistic values about other people.

(Alex)

Curricular Gaps. Alex described his reaction to how evolution was presented in his middle-school life science class, where students were told they could believe what they wanted:

I can remember in seventh grade science, which was, like, life science, our, we were, we got to the evolution unit. And my seventh-grade science teacher started by saying, now this is, I'm not saying that I believe this. I'm just going to put that out there right now. I'm just saying I have to teach it because it's in the textbook, but you can believe what you want, blah, blah, blah. I was like, what? Like, is this, this is science, right? We're just gonna, we're gonna believe in the science. But it's just like, things like that where I think, over time, I was like, whoa, this is weird that we're, there's certain subjects that get

treated so much differently than what I, what I would imagine they would be treated at a public school or at a, in a secular institution. (Alex)

Alex went on to say how this was an example of what made his schooling experience go from bad to worse. “So yeah, I think middle school was, was rough and it progressively got worse going into high school for those same reasons.”

Juan pointed out that there was a lack of positive representation in his K-12 schooling around the contributions of Filipinos in Hawaiian history: “We were just plantation workers and that's it, we're, we don't do it. We haven't done anything here. We're not proud of anybody or any, right? Which, which is how I grew up.”

Punana described learning about the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom for the first time in an undergraduate class with Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask, which made him realize that his high school education had not included accurate Hawaiian history.

When you go to _____ (name of high school), right, you think you're getting this really good education. For some part you are, you know, but there is a... I took a class called Racism in Education by Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask. And one of the things that happened in that class was, um, she said something about the Hawaiian overthrow. And then I said, in class, what overthrow? And then Dr. Trask was like, Punana, what school did you go to? I said, oh, I graduated from _____ (name of school). And then she just said, know your history. And I didn't know what that meant because I was 19 or 20, and I was kind of intimidated by her, but yet really respected her ... And I remember calling my dad afterward, I was like, dad, there was an overthrow? And he kind of laughed. He's like, yes, son, there was an overthrow. And I didn't really know at the time what that was. Um,

and you know, I kinda just thought about it as an, uh, event that influenced my teaching... I felt robbed of the opportunity to learn about my past from ____ (name of school) school, and the more I learned my history about this particular school, the more I could see why they wouldn't want to teach it. (Punana)

For Punana, this experience was a significant catalyst in pushing him to learn more about Hawaiian history, to teach his students about Hawaiian histories and settler colonialism, and also to advocate for the inclusion of modern Hawaiian history in the graduation requirements at the school he attended and where he now teaches.

Participants spoke about the devaluation or relative invisibility of various identities in their lived experiences, which could have been through the lack of diversity or representation, outright school segregation, pressure to assimilate into dominant cultures by giving up one's cultural values and practices, or curricular gaps in representation.

Complex Conscientization Processes

Within this theme, participants spoke about becoming more aware about justice issues in a variety of ways, sometimes through their own educational experiences, professional experiences, ongoing readings, or conversations. Some spoke about proactively seeking out certain types of learning by putting themselves in certain spaces, or proactively reading in certain disciplines. Many reflected upon past experiences through a lens of greater awareness acquired since those experiences, which helped them develop more coherent or nuanced thinking about social justice. Sometimes participants spoke about recognizing systemic, structural, institutional, or historical issues that contributed to injustice in their own lived experiences.

Seeking It Out. Both Joanie and Ahuli'i talked about making efforts to seek out specific learning experiences around social justice, also pointing out how easy it was for others around them, by default, not to have the same experiences or awareness.

Every opportunity I get, I try to take some of it in, but like I said, if you're not putting yourself in those spaces, you're not really getting it. (Joanie)

I will say it was because I was actively looking for it. I think you could totally go to ____ (name of university) and not, or, you know, go to university anywhere, and not have those experiences. But it was because I was like, oh, I want to learn more about this. So I took, like, you know, First Nation studies, First Nations resource management, all of that was super, super formative for me. (Ahuli'i)

Joanie described more specifically how putting herself in certain spaces allowed her to learn more about injustice issues through conversations with people of other groups, and how that led to awareness around Japanese settler impacts in Hawaiian history:

I think, yeah, I mean, I have kind of made an effort to put myself in these spaces ... and I feel like that a lot of people in Hawai'i don't see it as an issue, kind of like I didn't see it as an issue until I started talking to all of these people, and realizing what their struggle was ... After I started doing all of this work, I started to realize my role, not really my role, but how I am, like, I'm a settler colonizer in this space, you know, and like, I never grew up thinking like that. But after hearing more about Native Hawaiian history, and, you know, just like really studying, like the timeline of how things went down, and then realizing that, hey, we are like the White people in Hawai'i. You know, like Japanese

people are the white people. No wonder they hate us so much. You know, you don't really get it until you realize, like, the history. (Joanie)

Punana talked about the ongoing reading he seeks out for his own continued learning, along with starting to learn Hawaiian language as an adult, as part of his response to realizing that he had experienced "curricular neglect" in his own education, by never having learned about the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom.

I'm trying to learn the Hawaiian language for the past three years, but now I'm reading, I mean, I've always read Candace [Fujikane], Haunani [-Kay Trask], now it's Jamaica [Osorio], you know what I mean, all these, now people are publishing all these works now, I read them all. And I think that's another thing I do, is just read, you know, I'm just an avid, and I read the political science stuff. I read the Noenoe Silva, I read the Noelani Goodyear [Ka'ōpua], you know, I read all of their stuff over there. (Punana)

For Quang, the discovery of Toni Morrison was a catalyst in the development of his identity awareness and SJE consciousness, along with his love for literature. He sought out this reading even though he had not yet been assigned to read it, partly because Morrison was the only non-White, living author in the syllabus for that course. He described the feeling of recognition when reading her work, in contrast to the other authors he had read:

And I read it and I, like, six hours later, I awoke from the fever dream... But I was so drawn in by the language, and the feeling, and the empathy, and thinking about what it means to be a formerly enslaved person at that time ... And I'm not, you know, a black woman, obviously, and I'm not, you know, even from that century, but there was something about the way Toni Morrison was writing *Sethe* that I was like, I am aligned

more with this person than I am with John Locke, you know what I mean? I don't even understand why, but like, identity wise, it was like, no, I'm definitely this person over here... I don't know, talking about identity. It may be, it's this idea of otherness, or difference, especially in a place where you're, like, in this fancy university, and you're the only person that looks like you, or has the sort of background that you do. I don't know. There's something powerful in recognition. (Quang)

Reflecting on Past Experiences with More Recently Acquired Awareness. As Juan gained contextual knowledge about the experiences of Filipinos, he started to understand why he disidentified with being Filipino. He describes this experience like the opening of a “floodgate,” or a catalyst that brought on deeper learning, reflection, and a stronger emotional response.

Learning about why, historical context, and why, why did I feel a certain way about my ethnicity? And it makes sense. It's like, of course I wouldn't be proud of it, right? Right. It was designed that way. We didn't see myself in K-12 [curriculum], even in my undergrad. Um, my mom and, my mom and my aunties were told not to teach us our language. We were teased in ethnic jokes. Of course, why would I want to be Filipino, right? And so I, I totally disidentified. I was one of them that said I'm local. I'm not Filipino. And so, and so for my twenties, and my thirties even, but it's only when, I went into my Ph.D. program and took, and just started taking, um, you know identity courses in education. I'm like, then I only started having this critical consciousness about, like, myself and, like, my lived experience ... And that was, it was a course I took, I think in 2019 fall, I took early on in the Ph.D. that like, she made us think about our own identities. And I'm like, and that, that is what opened this floodgate of pain, of wanting to explore.

Like Juan, Arita only began to think about her family and earlier disidentification with Filipino identity after taking graduate school courses.

I didn't even know what type of Filipino I was, growing up. Like my grandma and them didn't talk about it. My grandma remarried a Korean-Hawaiian man. And like we learned all about being Korean. So, like, even in the structure, even my family structure kind of follows, like, a racial hierarchy, too, right. Like, he never talked about being Hawaiian. We never got to talk about anything Filipino. And it was like, all his stories of like, how his Korean dad came, or how all his siblings have Korean name. And he's not even biological, you know, but we took on more identity and food ...So I'm looking at all of that now and being like, oh my God, I didn't even realize that that was going on. (Arita)

Like Juan, Mei used the term “floodgate” to describe a shift in her thinking that she relates to SJE, and which she earlier described as a “cultural awakening.”

I read Haunani-Kay Trask's book in my first semester of my master's program. And I think that just opened the floodgates. And now looking back, I'm, like, it all seems super obvious. But it wasn't, at the time, it was all completely new, and like, groundbreaking for me. (Mei)

Seeing Systems. Arita used the word “hierarchy” to describe her family's valuation of different ethnic identities. In similar reflections, participants spoke about recognizing systems at work in the issues that shaped their SJE consciousness. While reflecting on his disidentification, Juan began to see systems at work.

What system made me not know who I am? And not want to be a Filipino, and not learn about myself? (Juan)

Naoko spoke about an early awareness that disproved her belief around individual responsibility for success:

I wanted to prove that you can, you can do anything you want, if you want to do it no matter what, so I kept pushing [my parents] to send me to a public school. Like no, I'm going to make it no matter where I go, because it's up to the person, not the environment. But then as I got older, I realized like, yes, a person's will can make a difference but also the opportunities that person is allotted. (Naoko)

Formative Schooling Experiences. Ahuli'i described in detail a formative learning high school experience which connected to existing feelings of pride and connectedness in her Hawaiian identity, along with a resulting feeling of empowerment:

I think as a student, the first time I thought about, oh, this is like, progressive, equitable teaching, because I was like, actually cognizant of it, was in high school. We did, it was an American history class, but my teachers did an entire unit about the overthrow and annexation. And it was like, super in-depth ... I talked about him because he wrote this super in-depth curriculum about the annexation and overthrow, at an age where we could, like really grasp it and take that learning really far. I did learn about the overthrow in elementary school, I had, we had a pretty good unit about it as well. But this, it was really inquiry-based and like the, the last project of it was to do like a mock trial, where it was like, you know, Queen Lili'uokalani versus the United States, like, as if that was the court case. Yeah. It was really good. It was a lot of research. A lot of primary source work, but with a focus of, it, it's like coming to it from you know, it was an overthrow, right. It was not legal. Which is a perspective, I hadn't really heard before. I knew that, like people had

emotions about it. And it was like a very emotional time. But I don't think it was ever explicitly spelled out like, this was an illegal overthrow. Yeah. And there should have been legal recourse, and it just never happened. And so therefore, let's try to make it happen in a classroom. And that was really cool. Yeah. And like putting it in our hands. It felt empowering, right? Like, I felt empowered by all this knowledge. (Ahuli'i)

Ahuli'i also described her school trips to Kaho'olawe as formative experiences, especially in terms of her Hawaiian identity.

That was kind of the tradition at that point to send, if you made it through the, if you did four years of Hawaiian language, you got to go on a trip ... And so I went to Kaho'olawe. And it was one of the most, if not the most formative experience of my life ... [it was] just incredible ... I was like, oh, I'm Hawaiian. And then when I was in Kaho'olawe, like, oh, this is what it means to be Hawaiian. Like, I felt the, the connection to the land that people talked about in being Hawaiian. Yeah, I felt that, like really, truly for the first time ... that sort of metaphysical and maybe physical [connection].

Ahuli'i spoke about how her trips to Kaho'olawe were

... an opportunity that was given to me, like, through school ... Which is pretty incredible, right? So I think, actually, now I think about it, that is pretty, that's like social justice education.

In addition to deepening her connection to Hawaiian identity, Ahuli'i engaged in deep, experiential, contextualized learning in preparation for and during the trip.

We did do a lot of work and research before the trip, like we learned all about the history of Kaho'olawe. We watched that really good documentary about it, you know, we talked

about its history and the, you know, military's involvement. So we were, like, very well-versed in its history. And ... we had to write an 'oli. So, we had to research ... the cultural significance of the island and cultural practice when you're there ... And then there's also 'oli you have to know when you go, as part of the protocol ... But I do think the learning about the history of Kaho'olawe is certainly not apolitical because of the military's destruction of the islands ... I mean, the military rendered it uninhabitable.

Valerie described an educational experience in her undergraduate studies that started a process of thinking around her White privilege and responsibilities, and an important part of her social justice educator identity.

I chose to take an ethnic studies class. It was civil rights. It was movements of the 60s. That's what it was called. And that professor was the first one who woke me up and he was like, uh, you're White and like, you have some responsibility here. Like before that, it was all just like, Oh, that's so unfortunate. You know, that, like, people are suffering and like no connection whatsoever. And I think that was my first waking up of like, oh my gosh, you know, like, I have a responsibility? And I didn't get it ... so that was just like, also an awakening for me of like, okay, like, I have some learning to do.

Reflecting on this experience later, Valerie described the sense of responsibility she acquired:

This system was built, you know, by White people for White people, therefore, you benefit from it, right. And so you have a responsibility to see what the injustices are and restructure it so that it's more fair.

Jen had a similar eye-opening experience in her undergraduate courses, through which she was able to reflect more deeply on her own lived experiences.

I took an ethnic studies seminar and I took, I took communications courses, and I took history, and I took all these really interesting classes that opened up my eyes to not only the fact that like many things that happened to me and my sister were wrong, but that there were these systems and forces at play that very much created a lot of the circumstances that I was growing up in. (Jen)

Lemon described a detailed experience that made her question her previous science learning and the impact on Native Hawaiian communities.

I remember the teacher, the professor, talking about diabetes, and I didn't really have that much experience with it at the time ... Okay, we're going to learn about this case study of Nauru, which is in Micronesia. And I hadn't heard of Nauru at the time. And so the professor was White. The majority of the class was White. I was the only one from the Pacific in that room. And it was basically just this like this case blasting Nauruans. Telling, explaining how they are the fattest people in the world, are the most unhealthiest people in the world. And basically, that White people needed to somehow save them from themselves. And I didn't question it, the way that I might have actively protested it now... And when I went to grad school, my research that I agreed to sign on [to] when I started grad school was on propensity of type two diabetes in Native Hawaiian children. Looking at single nucleotide polymorphisms, or SNPs, that we could potentially find, like, a molecular basis for type two diabetes in populations. Now, I didn't ever question why we didn't already know this in 2010, that we had ideas and inferences across the world of different SNPs that affected populations... And at the time, my professors who were helping me were the ones collecting blood samples

from a multi-ethnic group of students across our hometown. And, I did, I did the project but in the meantime of doing this master's degree, I realized how, I don't know what the right word is, I don't think it's immoral, but it could be, could be on the, on the lines of immorality, that we are collecting blood samples in order to make claims about this idea that there was a genetic basis to it. And so I guess I just keep standing on the idea of what, what good came out of us collecting samples. Did we develop trust within the community, are we, were we one of the problematic people that go into Indigenous communities and take, and don't really give back? And so, I didn't take the blood samples, but I, I benefited from it. So, in the, while doing my master's degree _____ (name of advisor) was like, think of it beyond beyond the blood, think of the whole person. Think of the family, think of everything else beyond the blood. And so that whole idea made me consider like what, why were, and I thought back to my, my classes, why were the Nauruans the unhealthiest people or the fattest people? And it's because of their consumption of Spam. It was because of their consumption of other processed foods and their lack of fresh foods, and their lack of place-based agriculture. And then that made me question like, whose fault is that? And it's definitely not their fault. It's definitely United States colonization's fault, like the bombing of Micronesia's fault. Everything shitty that the White people have done, to make decisions about the Pacific. It's that, it's that, it's not the Nauruans, and they are just victims of this, like, environmental racism. (Lemon)

On reflection, Lemon considered the possible harm that she was part of, due to what she describes as being “misguided” by her education. She connects this thinking, and her diabetes curriculum, to her awareness around Asian settler colonialism.

I felt like I was misguided. I felt that I was inaccurately educated. And in, in doing so, did I bring harm to the communities that I love so dearly? It makes me, like, just go through all this stuff, like, and unpack even more of the Asian settler colonialism that we experience. So, everything, like, I think, all my, all my past experiences, all my, my ritualistic learning of science has been questioned, which is why this diabetes curriculum comes about. (Lemon)

Formative Professional Experiences. Lemon reflected on an experience from earlier in her career, where her team received criticism for the place-based math curriculum they created, and how the experience honed her thinking around disrupting systems:

And all we did, quite honestly, as I look back on that, all we did was take the very basic math concept, that basic, all the math concepts of Common Core, and then put a place-based name onto the lesson, or onto the activity. So instead of an oak tree, we're talking about a koa tree. And it's like, are we, looking back on it now, did we really change systems? Did we disrupt systems to ensure equity and learning? And no, we did not. And so, I understand that criticism now. And that criticism really propelled me to think how am I disrupting systems and how am I being a change agent for all kids. (Lemon)

Juan spoke about teaching at a Hawaiian-focused charter school and how that experience influenced his thinking about SJE.

That trained me, you know, to see things critically, looking back, it's like, that was very helpful for me to go through this, this process, like of social justice education in the context of Native Hawaiian issues through _____ (name of school), like, they trained me to actually have that. Like, how do we go about doing that? Right. It's like creating experiences for students to critically like examine curriculum. (Juan)

It really shaped my thinking about like, um, decolonizing curriculum, like how do we center community and, and culture? ... How do we provide, um, our students of Native Hawaiian ancestry to see themselves in curriculum, to involve the Hawaiian community, to advocate through testimonies and legislation, and even like practices, and how, how cultural practice, you know, so seven years now, that was my, that's my praxis... You are in it, like you're marching, you're at the Capitol, you're writing testimony. You're thinking about your Native, your Native, Hawaiian students. Like it, could they really train you to like, like, be critical, like this critical pedagogy, this, this, um, like centering Indigenous identity and views into curriculum. Like, you can't escape it, like, you just, you're engulfed in it. Everyone's doing it there.... It's embedded in the curriculum and the structure of the school. (Juan)

In similar fashion, Arita said that teaching at a Hawaiian-focused charter school changed her teaching:

After going to the school, I think the school changed how we teach, you know, like integration, place-based focus, place focus. Looking at the child differently. (Arita)

Steve described starting his current teaching position with a lack of familiarity about the places where many of his students were from. He attributed his SJE thinking to learning on the job as teacher and then ELL (English Language Learner) coordinator.

I remember like, early on, I remember meeting a kid from Chuuk. And you know, I'm like, I'm a social studies teacher, like I have the world map on the wall in my house, like I'm kind of geographically savvy, and I remember being like, I'm sorry, where are you from? Like, can you, can you write that down for me? Like, I had never heard of that place. And coming, you know, I don't even... Hawai'i for like, six, seven months at that point, I hadn't, the Pacific world was like a whole different place for me. But I remember like very, I remember, like, very clearly, like during lunch that day, just Googling Chuuk and being like, oh, okay. All right. And so, where now, I'm the advisor of our Micronesian student club. Yeah. So like, I've learned a lot about the places where my students come from. Yeah. But I came in knowing like, next to nothing. (Steve)

Steve also spoke about how he began to develop more understanding and empathy around his students' experiences, and how a colleague/mentor helped him shift towards seeing ELL students as having multiple assets instead of deficits.

I remember like hearing, like, talking to students, and, like, learning about their lives and like, you know what, it's a family of six, like living in one bedroom in a house or something, or, you know, or like 12 people in a two bedroom apartment, and learning about like, what, like, their lives are like, and and then also seeing, another thing that kind of did it, that kind of shifted my mindset early on was hearing from another teacher, she's one of those other teachers that kind of, like, took me under their wing. And looking at

our students from a more like asset based mindset, like what they are able to do as opposed [to] like, this whole term English learner, right? Like it's deficit based, but looking at, like, the languages that they bring to us, a lot of the kids coming from the Philippines already speak three languages. And this kind of looking at our students, like, from that frame of mind was something that kind of shifted that I remember, like, hearing that and kind of making that shift kind of early on, like, wow, these kids are really cool, like, they have some really interesting life stories that, um, make, you know, that I want to learn about, that, like, make this school interesting ... and having some empathy for our students. So, like, what they're doing, and what we're asking them to do, and, like, move, going into a new country, and learning a new language, and navigating a new culture and all that, like, it's hard. (Steve)

SJ Educator Identity as a Response to Lived Experiences

Many participants spoke about how being an SJE educator connected with their identities, or with their lived experiences around identity. Several participants spoke about having a strong, inherent sense of justice as part of their identities.

So, I grew up Buddhist, right? And so, we're always talking about humanistic values and making sure that everybody is happy, that we're not putting anybody down in that process of us becoming happy too, and becoming the best that we can be ... I think I personally always had like a strong sense of like, this isn't fair, or this needs to be fair, or if it's not fair, we need to make it right. And so maybe that was just part of my personality. (Naoko)

Honestly, like, I kind of went into it, you know, like, I want to, just as, like, a very naive cliché, but like that idea of “I want to change the world,” like that idealist purpose, becoming a teacher. (Valerie)

There’s an internal sense of pono that I feel. And, you know, sometimes it's just, like, in your na‘au, your gut, you're just like, it’s not right, it's not right. And you know ... it bothers you, you know, and you can't get rid of it. And I think so many factors influenced that, but I also think it might be innate. (Punana)

I think I came into education with a very like activist mindset ... And the more I read them [philosophers like Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall], the more it seemed like their work was focused on, like, what does it mean to to bring or to give more agency to people through knowledge, like through the dissemination of knowledge, and I was like, okay, well, that kind of points me in the direction of education. (Alex)

I very much found my path to an interest in like righting wrongs from experiencing a lot of things that I thought were wrong growing up. And I think that though, that things that are wrong and injustice makes such a huge mark on children specifically, more than anyone, and that children are also our greatest hope for, you know, creating a meaningful path to rightness in any way, on a large scale ... That’s been my path, like I care a lot about making things right, when I, once I realize that they're wrong. And I happen to

really like children too. So this just seemed like the most logical place for me to end up working, caring about social justice and education. (Jen)

Other educators described their relationship to social justice teaching, and their particular focus within SJE, as a response to their lived experiences with identity, place, and justice.

It's really about all of our students in the margins, who feel in the margins and don't see themselves at all. (Juan)

I know firsthand the damage that it can do when teachers and students and administrators don't openly support and advocate for students with diverse backgrounds. So it was really really important to me, even more than just being like a great academic teacher, was being a teacher that was like very gung ho about supporting the students regardless of how they were doing in my class, or you know, just really making sure I got to know them and check in with them, give them space, and and it was like my kind of guiding belief that education is not something is supposed to, you know, shut people down. It should always be something that uplifts people and makes them feel more comfortable with who they are. (Alex)

I always felt that my education, at least in later middle school and high school, was very ... yeah I was, was very traumatized in a lot of ways, and so, going knowingly, going back into a K-12 setting, I was like, okay, how can I be a teacher that I wanted to see when I was in high school but never had, like, what does that take for me to, like, to support my students and make sure that they feel accepted and and empowered. (Alex)

Punana spoke about various factors that contributed to this SJE consciousness around advocating for Hawaiian history education and settler awareness. One catalyst was the protests against the proposed construction of a Thirty-Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea. This led him to pursue further learning around issues affecting Native Hawaiians, and then bringing that knowledge into his teaching and advocacy work at school. He connects education about accurate histories to a sense of identity by expressing a hope that his own children can have a better experience than he did in terms of knowing who they are.

And so Mauna Kea was actually more of a starting point to learn more about, not only my Hawaiian identity, but how can I serve the lāhui in the skills that I have, and where I'm at. So Mauna Kea serves as the catalyst that drove my desire to help our people in the way that I can. And one of the ways that I can, it's not only educating our students, but it's educating the damn school, you know? ... The whole goal is to make this school better. I mean, it's, you know, to make this school better and I want my kids to come here, but I also want them to have a better educational experience about knowing who they are, you know, than I did. (Punana)

Punana spoke about how this event channeled his na'au sense of what is pono towards more learning and teaching around the issues faced by Native Hawaiians.

That's when I started to just read and research and you know, because it was the Mauna Kea thing where I was just, like, it just, hold up, this bothered me. That's when that sense of justice really like, that was the time where like, if you want to pick a moment, that's when it was, when the kupuna were arrested, when I saw what they were doing. And I was pissed, you know ... but I have to research, you know, and study and know more ... I

would say that idea of Mauna Kea is where it started ... I remember just crying, you know, hearing and seeing what they were doing ... it was just like, that was an injustice, it continues to be an injustice. And it just, yeah, and I think that's when my greater sense, I mean, also, I was proud to be Hawaiian, but I think that's when [I decided] I'm going to learn Hawaiian ... to know a lot more about my people, you know, and learning a language at this age is freaking hard. But, I can read, and I can study it and use my skills as an academic and a teacher, to help the lāhui, to help our people ... and it can be educating the settlers and educating others. (Punana)

Russell spoke about how he applied his personal experiences with W. E. B. DuBois's double consciousness to his experience as a transplant educator in Hawai'i.

As a black person, it always comes back to, you know, W. E. B. DuBois's double consciousness. I have to be aware, even, you know, even now living in Hawai'i, I'm aware of how I'm seen by others, and how I see myself, right, all at the same time. And I think that, having cultivated that, you know, all my life, it's kind of something that's passed down from parent to child, just by the nature of living in America and in the world, I think it just leaves me open to understand that, you know, who I might think people to be might, you know, that is valid, but it might not be who they think they are themselves, who they see themselves to be, or that my perception of them might be affected by my own experiences. And so I approach things in that way, I approached me coming to Hawai'i in that way. And I approach my teaching my students in that way, like, you know, in what ways is my culture different from theirs, in what ways, you know, are what I believe to be common sense, you know, differently common for them, right,

because of the nature of having grown up in different places and different cultures, and, you know, how my needs are different from theirs, and vice versa. You know, what kind of privileges I carry, being a man and society are being perceived, you know, and, and being gendered as man and this society not being as dark, as many black people are, I do understand that there's privilege and that, you know, feature ism, texture ism. And, and being aware that that is, is something that exists all over the world. And how those things might affect my students and their access to opportunities. And yeah, just bringing all those things with me into the classroom. (Russell)

Valerie was drawn to social justice partly as a form of healing from the racist ideas in her family:

Like all of this, for me, is like, just, um, yeah, like healing from like, the ick that is in my family's past. Like my grandma. My maternal grandparents were pretty like, you know, anti-Black ... And I definitely, like, pushed against that as a teenager, I was like, I was just really surprised that that was like a belief system in my family ... yeah, like, I remember asking my grandma once, like, well, what if I decide I want to marry a Black man? And she's like, well, I wouldn't come to your wedding. I have a couple memories of, like, just straight racist jokes... (Valerie)

Ulu attended an elite private high school after attending a series of different schools. She described her experiences around belonging and how these experiences made her want to become a teacher:

It was such a weird experience because, I was like, I went for sports. So, I just hung out with all the athletes, and we were all like the poor Polynesian athletes. And it was weird. Never been surrounded by so many, like, rich people in my life. So that was kind of

crazy... Even if people are, like, rich in middle school, you don't really know, but like in high school, you start to really see it. Like the cars, and the clothes, and this, and vacations, and parties... And so, it kind of hit me, I was, like, oh, like, money, like, I know it kind of hit me a little late in life, but I was just like, money makes a big difference ... And [I] just started thinking about, like, education and and just how different all the different schools I went to, and like the inequity within that ... and it just got me thinking, and that's like when I made the choice to become a teacher, when I was a sophomore in high school. I was like, oh, I really want to be, like, that one person who makes a kid feel like they can do whatever they want kind of thing. (Ulu)

In synthesizing her specific lived experiences, critical awareness, and her own connections to place in her work as educator, Lemon described her teaching as something very specific to her and her own experiences:

It feels like I'm teaching. I'm not just a parrot of a curriculum, or I'm not just being the messenger of knowledge... this is a lesson or a lesson plan that I have developed, like, from my own experience, and it's something that I can truly share with students... I could never write a lesson plan for someone to follow on this, because this is so much more of my own lived experiences, that I can bring into the conversation. (Lemon)

Conclusion: What Experiences Shaped Educators' Orientations Towards SJE?

Educators spoke about their relationships to place and people as an important part of developing their thinking around SJE. These accounts provide a way for deeper insight into what identity means beyond race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, socioeconomic class, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other identity categories. It seemed important for participants to know who they

were, and that they expected their educational experiences to include, support, and affirm such knowledge. Participants spoke with feeling about the experiences that shifted, deepened, or clashed with how they knew themselves, how other people saw them, how institutions (like school districts or schools) treated them, and what they wanted to know about their own identities.

Participants also described both positive and negative schooling experiences that shaped their orientation towards SJE. These experiences included issues with structural school segregation, supportive or alienating school cultures and communities, and issues of curricular neglect with regards to Hawaiian history. Participants spoke about varied ways of making connections between past experiences and growing awareness, engaging with ongoing learning, and awareness of systems that contributed to injustice.

How do K-12 Educators in Hawai‘i Define and Conceptualize SJE?

The survey included a question asking participants to define SJE. These written definitions were one factor in selecting participants for the next step of data collection, the interviews. An examination of the 40 survey responses provided a broad overview of participants’ definitions, but these responses varied greatly in length and amount of detail. Response length to this question ranged from three words to 133 words. Some answers were vague, containing lists of terms like “equality,” “inclusion,” and “holistic,” without providing much detail on what these terms meant to participants. After analyzing these 40 survey responses, I generated five broad themes in the definitions of SJE:

1. Empowerment
2. Identity consciousness

3. Equity
4. Systems, structures, and histories
5. Skills and awareness

I proceeded to conduct interviews with participants selected from the pool of 40 survey respondents. The process of interviewing allowed me to verify the written definitions from the surveys, but I was also able to invite participants to elaborate on what they had written. Also, by then asking participants to share about their life histories and SJE teaching experiences, I was able to elicit more rich, detailed information about how they conceptualized SJE, including examples of SJE implementations and challenges. During the first interview, I read out loud the participant's written survey response to the question of how they defined SJE and invited them to elaborate upon or add to this definition.

While the five themes above remained in the back of my mind as I explored the interview data, I approached this stage of the data analysis with openness to findings that looked different from the examination of the survey responses. From the in-depth analysis of interview data, I fine-tuned the five broad themes identified previously by focusing on more specific and nuanced information within these ideas. I was able to flesh out in greater detail the idea of empowerment, which participants spoke of as serving the purpose of guiding students towards action against oppressive systems. The idea of identity consciousness continued to be important in many ways, but the deeper analysis brought up many details about participants being responsive not only to identities but also to the cultural and historical contexts of Hawai'i as a place. Participants spoke of place in varying ways in their SJE definitions, and these variations were often related to an awareness of their positionalities and relationships to Hawai'i. In relation to skills and awareness,

participants spoke about critical knowledge and awareness of histories, narratives, and oppressive systems as important in SJE. Participants also spoke about making connections across existing boundaries in how they thought about their work as social justice educators.

The themes and sub-themes generated from survey and interview responses on SJE definitions and conceptualizations are:

Table 5.

Themes and Sub-Themes on Participants' Definitions and Conceptualizations of SJE

1. Core Concern with Equity	
2. Empowerment Towards Action and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowerment Through Skills and Knowledge ● Empowerment through Civic Engagement ● Empowerment to Enrich Communities ● Educator Empowerment
3. Responsiveness to Identities and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Responsiveness to Identities ● Responsiveness to Hawai'i ● Awareness of Outsider Status ● Grappling with Settler Colonialism ● Issues of 'Āina, Sovereignty, and Militarization of Hawai'i
4. Awareness of Systems, Structures, and Histories	
5. Making Connections, Transcending Boundaries	

The following sections elaborate on each of the themes from both the exploration of survey responses as well as interview data. I refer to participants in two ways. I did not assign or ask survey respondents for pseudonyms, but I did ask interview participants for pseudonyms. If I mention or quote a survey response, I refer to the participant as “survey respondent” and a number (e.g., survey respondent 6). If I quote or mention a participant whom I did interview, I use their pseudonym.

Core Concern with Equity

When asked to define SJE, many survey respondents listed equity as a major concern or goal of SJE, though sometimes they used the words “fair,” “equality,” or “access,” in place of, or in addition to the term “equity.” These definitions were not always specific enough to specify the “what” or “where” of equity concerns, for example, whether they meant inequities within the classroom, schools, educational system, or throughout society.

All education that questions the hegemonic constructs of the educational system and works to correct the inequities within. (Respondent 1)

Education that supports students seeking a more equitable world and understanding how social inequity has affected all parts of society. (Respondent 7)

Social justice education at its core is about equity; the equitable distribution of resources, privileges, and opportunities. (Mei)

Sometimes, without using the terms equity or equality, participants defined SJE in ways that I interpreted as being concerned with equity. For example,

I would define social justice education as the ability to provide teachable moments, perspectives, empathy, and engagement to and for ALL members of our local and global communities so that all people can share in the responsibility to change/tweak our society so that everyone can prosper in their own unique way given their circumstances.

(Respondent 9, original emphasis of “ALL”)

The idea of equity is mentioned even in very brief responses, which suggests that equity is a core goal for SJE.

The interview data reinforced the importance of equity as a core goal in SJE, and an essential part of the SJE definition. The interview data also provided more specific elaborations on what participants thought about when they thought about equity:

I think we want our kids to be successful in a world that is still inequitable. And we unfortunately still have to prepare kids for a world that isn't equitable. We, of course, we are shifting and disrupting systems so that people recognize that there is like the neurodivergence here but the world isn't equitable. What are we doing to prepare kids for that? That is something I struggle with. (Lemon)

It's important because, if you look at things like graduation rates for EL students, like they're lower than, it depends on how you look at it, but like, then there's gaps. There's achievement gaps in education, there's gaps in health, there's gaps in economic gaps,

there is, and a lot of that can be, is, like, because of language access. So that's, what I, that's what gets me excited to, like, come to work lately, is things like that, like, produce, trying to fill that need. (Steve)

In a specific example of implementing SJE, Pedro spoke in detail about his participation in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project that a doctoral student conducted at his school, and how the experience led him to hone his thinking around equitable experiences for students who had been assigned to different courses based on English language proficiency.

So the students involved in this curriculum was now your ninth grade English Honors, sheltered English classes, and Foundations classes. So, they were all engaging in the same curriculum, like, you know, like this, it sounds, it is a rigorous curriculum, because, like, we took all the kids like this, like five groups of kids to the same field trip, we took them to talk to the same people, right. So in a way, we eliminated those labels while we were working on it, because everybody was talking about community health. Everybody was proposing, like things that should be evident in the community. (Pedro)

Empowerment Towards Action and Advocacy

In the survey responses, many participants defined SJE in terms of empowering students to become more engaged citizens. Empowerment incorporates the skills of recognizing or identifying past or existing injustices, addressing oppressive systems, and taking civic action to bring about liberation for themselves and their communities.

Empowering students to stand up for what they believe in in a constructive way. I want them to find their voice and not just keep things status quo. I want them to question things, challenge what they see as unjust, and make their world a better place. (Naoko)

Teaching students to be critical of structures and systems that oppress members of society based on sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, language, socioeconomic status, or other human differences so that they may be agents of social change throughout their lifetimes. (Jen)

In the interviews, many participants defined SJE explicitly in terms of empowering students to take action, to create change for themselves and their communities in an inequitable world. Participants also spoke about SJE as a form of empowerment for themselves and their educator peers, or the feelings of empowerment they themselves experienced as learners, which then shaped their thinking about SJE. The following sections discuss these sub-themes of empowerment:

1. Empowerment Through Skills and Knowledge
2. Empowerment through Civic Engagement
3. Empowerment to Enrich Communities
4. Educator Empowerment

The theme of empowerment was intricately connected with other themes like the focus on skills and awareness, which participants spoke of in terms of serving the purpose of empowerment towards action. In particular, participants spoke about the power of educating oneself and others within the realm of SJE. Participants also spoke about the role of identity consciousness as a critical foundation for the process of enacting empowerment.

Empowerment Through Skills and Knowledge. Many participants emphasized that the purpose of gaining skills and knowledge in education is so that students can be empowered to take action towards liberation.

In my eyes Social Justice Education is equipping students with the knowledge and skill sets needed to dismantle ongoing systems of oppression and persecution in our society and in their communities. (Alex)

In my philosophy, and why I teach, is that students come to school to learn how to liberate themselves and the people around them. It's not just a space where they're learning academic skills, but also using these skills to better themselves and to better the community, and their families. Because that, I think, should be the role of education. (Pedro)

It's a praxis ... it's how you approach learning for the, for the purpose of critical consciousness, right? And, and so, it's not just content ... We learn history and then ... what do you do with it, right? ... And so it's for action, it's for, it's for critical consciousness and skills to provide our youth, to question their lived societies, their lived experiences, right? To have the skills to be like, okay, what are these forces, these systems of power ... and identify it. (Juan)

Participants also elaborated on what types of skills they believed were important for empowering students in their conceptions of SJE:

[SJE is] an educational orientation that is focused on ... developing skills for independent and collaborative learning. (Valerie)

Quang emphasized skills over content in his English classes, and the skills he prioritizes have to do with communication and civic engagement:

I'm very much of this skills approach. Like in English, we're teaching skills, we're not teaching content. I don't care, you know, that they know the names of the main characters.

I want them to know how to talk about something, you know, how to write about something. And the same thing with, you know, these issues that are coming up in the newspaper every day I want them to be able to have a take on it in a measured way.

And also to disagree with other people, in a polite, civil way. (Quang)

The skill of gaining critical knowledge for oneself and sharing knowledge with others was also an important skill:

I felt the power of knowledge, like educating yourself was really important, right? They [the students] did all those posters, where they knew, like, people would be reading them and the purpose of it was to educate others ... The power of, importance of finding out more information, talking to people, learning from people ... they did it well. (Ahuli'i)

Participants mentioned the importance of being able to communicate on challenging or controversial topics:

[SJE involves] a willingness to confront difficult and uncomfortable subject matter in order to build both mine and my students' fluency in communicating across controversy.

(Alex)

That's where social justice education comes from. It isn't, it's nothing to do with, do you have the fanciest equipment? So can you have the deepest conversation? Are you able to communicate science topics? Really understand all the layers of what's going on in the environment into your learning. (Lemon)

This idea of communication across complex issues is also part of Quang's definition of cultural competencies:

[SJE is] equipping our students with the skills and cultural competencies to thrive in today's world. (Quang)

Quang elaborated on what he meant by cultural competencies:

Cultural competencies, I feel, are tools in a toolbox. These are the tools that all of us need to know, to arm ourselves, and to carry conversations into the world, so that ... they [students] aren't easily taken in by false equivalencies, you know, that they know that there are institutional biases, that they don't necessarily subscribe to model minority myth and things like that ... All of this is part and parcel of, like, giving them the vocabulary, and the tools, from which to rethink their place in the world. And hopefully, that will lead to further conversations about oh, my place in the world ... So cultural competencies for me are the tools, the vocabulary if you will, for them to start having further conversations around culture and identity. (Quang)

Participants also emphasized civic engagement skills, the ability to use one's voice in a community to solve problems or make decisions.

Learners experience the power of their individual voice and learn how to use it in decision making and problem solving within their learning community, and the wider community outside of school. (Valerie)

You develop the habits and dispositions of civic discourse, right? Tolerating disagreement, actively seeking out people who disagree with you, coming to consensus, collaborating. (Matt)

Participants mentioned critical thinking skills as an important part of SJE:

Critical thinking skills are essential, including questioning/examining media stories, sources of information for biases, seeking out multiple perspectives, using tools for communication, and revising thinking based on new learning. (Valerie)

I think the the magic of the classroom ... is I don't lecture students. I will stage, you know, my knowledge for them in little bite sized things, but it always ends with a question. And I don't want to fill their pitchers with my knowledge. I want them to generate it for themselves ... I think when the classes are working really well, I see ... the kids think for themselves, thinking actively, thinking critically, revising their opinions when confronted with an argument that they find insufficient, really looking hard at things. Just really doing basic close reading. (Matt)

Ahuli'i spoke about how one important component of her work as librarian is to teach children how to "use information properly," as part of "information literacy, and like it's a lot of literacy skills, information, digital, critical."

Quang also framed empathy as a skill that is foundational to SJE work.

I wish my students are able to empathize with other people and practice that empathy, I think is an important skill for them to get out of my class. I'm not sure exactly how that fits in precisely with social justice, but I do believe it's something so foundational for them to even begin ... some of this work ... And so I really want my students to be able to empathize ... what I teach in literature ... the very act of close reading a piece of literature, is literally to imagine ourselves in another person's narrative, to literally, you know, imagine, put ourselves in other people's shoes. So I feel that empathy is a natural outgrowth for me ... as a literature teacher or an ELA teacher, in terms of ... social justice.

(Quang)

Some participants also talked about the ability to recognize oppressive systems as a skill:

Social justice education challenges historic social norms and helps children deconstruct socialization so that they can see, feel and hear the ways that systematic oppression perpetuates. (Respondent 11)

Empowerment for Civic Engagement and Action. In defining SJE, participants spoke about the importance of students learning about civic engagement and how to use their voices and actions in a democratic system.

Concepts of democracy are central to social justice education. Learners experience the power of their individual voice and learn how to use it in decision making and problem solving within their learning community, and the wider community outside of school.

(Valerie)

In teaching about democratic elections, Ahuli'i saw the effect it had on students to make connections between classroom learning and current events.

[It was] creating excited, passionate participants in democracy, right. They're observant, they're looking out for the signs ... That was very validating because all of a sudden, they're like looking outside and seeing, yeah, this is real, right? This is real to them.

(Ahuli'i)

Ahuli'i further reflected on this teaching experience and democracy, and how she hoped children would engage in much more than voting as part of civic engagement:

But I was thinking like, sometimes we think of voting as like the last step. But I think that maybe we should teach kids that voting is, like, not even a step. It's like the background. It's like, understood, everyone should be voting ... But we all do need to be educating and educated. We all need to be organizing in our communities around topics that we're passionate about. And organizing can mean educating others, it can be signing petitions, it can be doing direct action, but I think like thinking of voting not as like, step five, but as like a pre-step is important for kids to think about, like it's not just democracy by voting. It's democracy by doing A through Z. (Ahuli'i)

She also spoke about her lessons in which she builds a foundation around specific issues in Hawai'i, so that students could make informed choices in the future:

The big ideas that I thought would be important for them to hold on to as they get older, that they latched on to, which is good. You know, like, the lease for Pōhakuloa expires in 2029. They will be 18 when it's 2029. And, you know, maybe they'll be able to vote at

that time. And so having this knowledge now, I think, you know, hopefully, we'll have them looking out for that as they make informed choices as a voter. (Ahuli'i)

In similar fashion, Jen empowered her students in ways that connected to real-world issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, in ways that were developmentally appropriate and essential for the well-being of students as well as for the country.

One thing I did was we talked about ... how it wasn't okay to say China virus or China flu, and ... because people are doing ... people are being violent toward, you know, the Asian community in our country, and how that's not right ... I felt supported and my students were learning how to speak out without making themselves vulnerable ... and in a way that was developmentally appropriate, I think, for like third and fourth grade, and I think that was 2020 ... like this is critical for the well being of our country, and our students' safety, and many other important reasons. (Jen)

As part of his SJE work, Matt is coordinating a civic education initiative at his high school.

Obviously, we're in this moment in which democracy is under assault. ... We're calling it Educating for Democracy. How do we, and this was already in our [the school's] aims about, you know, creating 21st century citizens, people who are engaged in their community. The research on this is pretty clear about how you do that. You tell them how government works, you know, what are the three branches etc, etc, right? You get them involved in their community, and then you develop the habits and dispositions of civic discourse, right? Tolerating disagreement, actively seeking out people who disagree with you, coming to consensus, collaborating, you know, this sort of stuff. (Matt)

In Juan's conceptualization, advocacy and empowerment are fundamental to education:

This is education, what education is and should be, like, we learn things to advocate for our communities and our futures ... We show up ... and we make our voices heard, right? We disrupt the norm, we disrupt the structures that are set in place to not have our voices heard, right. And I was just, I mean, it's empowering. (Juan)

Empowerment to Enrich Communities. Many educators also spoke about empowerment through SJE as healing and sustaining individuals and communities. This included the idea that such empowerment would help students become lifelong advocates for their communities. Ahuli'i cited one goal of SJE as creating children who "feel responsible for and want to enact possible change in their communities." This included the potential for children to "imagine a society where justice is served in more equitable and restorative ways" (Alex).

Arita talked about her school's vision of fostering lifelong learning in the students so that they can access ancestral Hawaiian knowledge, think, and act in ways that are pono, and enact systemic change to strengthen and sustain their communities:

So it's building on ancestral knowledge and practices, exploring and acquiring ways that build on ancestral wisdom to bridge communities, then it's sustenance and empowerment for the communities. (Arita)

For Juan's school, the relationship with communities was reciprocal. He and his colleagues always considered how to involve members of the community to enrich student experiences:

Community was always a part of it ... Always had community, whether it's like, the Native Hawaiian community, whether it's like your legislators, whether it's people in the community itself, it is always a part of it ... it was always like ... how can we involve the community somehow? (Juan)

Working with a diverse English language learner population, Pedro spoke about how a student-led publication of a multilingual poetry anthology empowered them and enriched their communities. This form of empowerment is fundamental to his definition of SJE and motivation to teach.

We were talking to authors and finding out the reason why, while they are writing, you know, like, reinforcing the idea of that, when you write something, there's a purpose, when you write something, you're trying to achieve, like, that healing that Kathy Jetñil Kijiner was talking about ... Every time we receive, like, you know, like emails and reviews about how teachers have been using their work in their classroom, or how community organizations have started looking into it, and the students really felt empowered, that they were able to produce something that could influence the way leaders think, or influence the way teachers teach, or influence the way learners learn. (Pedro)

He elaborated on how this project enriched the existing community

It's a collection of poetry written by immigrant kids. But also it's, and we made sure that it's enriching the history of the neighborhood ... we were learning from the community, like we were using resources that we had in the community, but by publishing that book, we were able to enrich the the narrative of this place, right, like a narrative that maybe had not been shared before. (Pedro)

For Juan, the enrichment of communities was a key aspect of SJE and education in general. Teaching at a Hawaiian-focused charter school cultivated the basis for his approaches to SJE, where he connects scientific and cultural knowledge, action, and community well-being. He

described in detail an example of bringing these elements together while students learned about Hawaiian birds, uses of bird feathers in Hawaiian practices, and ecological factors affecting birds:

It's like, how do we have these artifacts, these products, projects, that become, that are tied to science, mainly towards biology, ecology, and then culture, identity ... and then that action part, what can I do? ... It's like, the action part is always a part of it, too ... there has to be some type of action ... they looked at legislation ... What are some legislation that are, that deals with the protection of the birds, and one of them was ... 'a'ole mosquito campaign ... I gave them the legislation, they read it. And then they wrote to the legislators to support this bill that would help eradicate mosquitoes. Yeah. And so you know, being that action part and being part of advocacy for the birds, right, empowered [them] to make change of some sort ... They can't use these traditional birds anymore, that what you saw [at the] Bishop Museum are traditional feathers, and that it was plentiful. And now we can't do that. But do we just stop your cultural practices? No, like, you should continue it. But you got to know that there are implications to not protecting the birds and maybe your children may not have these birds anymore. (Juan)

In her environmental science curriculum, Mei guides conversations around community and collective action around 'aina restoration:

It's this call for like collective action, doing things together, which I expand into community. And so, how can we collectively work to build community here in Kapālama, Kalihi area? And how do we, how do we remediate this small area of the issues that exist, that make it so that we can grow food, our 'aina site, like how do we remediate that? And then how do we continue to think about our area in, I guess, greater expansives. (Mei)

Ulu also spoke about the importance of educating students and their communities about environmental issues that affect them:

There's a lot of these issues that people aren't aware of, because they're not brought to their attention, or because we're not teaching about it in school. And it's time for us to like, know about our own community, and, like, try to do what we can to think of solutions to help this disparity and whatever's happening. And like, of course, we're not going to solve all or maybe, like, even most problems, or, like, if we solve any, even just one, it'd be like a huge, huge deal. But just be aware, this is what's happening in your own community and the best part is when they tell their parents and like, the whole family starts being aware of it. (Ulu)

Educator Empowerment. Earlier in this chapter, we saw how participants like Naoko, Alex, Jen, Punana, and Ulu spoke about SJE as a way for them to act on an internal sense of right and wrong. When speaking about SJE definitions, participants also spoke about their own empowerment as learners, educators, activists, or advocates. For example, Matt quoted Audre Lorde when speaking about the possibility of enacting meaningful change within an institution of privilege: “I take Audre Lorde’s point about masters’ houses and masters’ tools.¹ But I think that's actually what I'm trying to do a little bit.”

Ahuli‘i spoke about her feelings of hopefulness and empowerment connected to having students also take on the learning and caring about issues with militarization and pollution in Hawai‘i, issues that she had been thinking about for a long time.

¹ The Audre Lorde quote is “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

Empowering is a good word. I think it allowed me to kind of step away from my cynicism a little bit because I do think sometimes I can be cynical about that, those kinds of, like, you know, because I've been thinking and talking about the, you know, hyper militarization of Hawai'i since I was 16 years old. It's, it can be exhausting to just like, see zero change in that time, or even see it, like, get worse somehow, right? And so giving myself the permission to step outside of the cynicism and like the nihilism and be like, okay, well, I can't impart that part of it to them. So what can I do? And it's true, like, I can't be cynical trying to do this work, because that's not helpful. It's not productive. So it's empowering, it felt a little bit like your, breath of fresh air, like a breather. It's just like (sigh), the kids care about it. They're hopeful. I have to be hopeful because you know, what else is there? So it felt like a little bit of a weirdly, it felt like a little bit of a break even though we were so entrenched in it. But it was a it was like a positive being entrenched in it, because it was learning about it to actively find solutions rather than just learning about it.

Russell, a transplant teacher who came to Hawai'i through Teach For America, felt embraced by local communities, which was a factor in him feeling empowered to perpetuate Hawaiian ways of knowing and being in his Spanish classroom:

I have been so, so fortunate to have found community that has been welcoming, and ... they have shared, you know, their ways of knowing and ways of being with me. And have, you know, empowered me to perpetuate those things, you know, so even, even with all the impostor syndrome that I'm feeling, like, I feel empowered to, and welcome to, to

do my part to perpetuate the Indigenous ways of knowing and being of this place.

(Russell)

Joanie described her motivation to amplify voices of underrepresented educators, and to empower other educators to do the same through greater awareness.

My passion is, you know, learning about different underserved communities, or marginalized communities, and using whatever abilities that I have to advocate for, and uplift these communities, so that there can be more equity. (Joanie)

In particular, Joanie believes in highlighting the presence of Pacific Islanders when they get “lumped together” within broader categories like Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI).

They all get lumped together with AAPI and then you have like one Native Hawaiian, or one Pacific Islander, and you really can't find information because they all get lumped together. And so I'm trying to tell people like, we can't keep doing this, like, this hurts our Native Hawaiian population and our Pacific Islander population, and especially the students who don't see themselves represented like, we need to do better ... So again, it's just bringing it up and educating and, you know, helping people realize that they can help with the uplifting.

Punana saw his role as educator in the context of helping the Hawaiian lāhui in the context of advocating for modern Hawaiian history at the school where he teaches:

One of the ways that I can [contribute to the lāhui], it's not only educating our students, but it's educating the damn school.

He also spoke more broadly about how educational efforts do not have to be labeled social justice education in order for it to be a form of justice, and how the visible acts of SJE may not be the only types of SJE taking place in schools:

I think sometimes as teachers, or maybe as principals, or as schools, they want to see the big thing. You know, not the little small acts of teacher justice that they do in their classroom every day. And maybe, for teachers ... they're doing it just because it's right ... It's not conscious, you know what I mean, you just do the right thing. I think a lot of the best educators just do the right thing, because it's the right thing. They know something in their gut ... So, I think those are the some of the best educators, you know, they do the small acts of justice over there ... Some people are doing justice every day, it's just not labeled or getting the attention that they deserve. And a lot of teachers are not looking for the attention ... They're quiet warriors. (Punana)

Responsiveness to Identities and Place

Participants spoke in various ways about being aware of identity issues in their conceptualizations of SJE, but also to culture, place, and contexts.

Responsiveness to Identities. From the survey responses defining SJE, I generated the theme of identity consciousness. The survey definitions of SJE mentioned the importance of identities in various ways.

Teaching students to be critical of structures and systems that oppress members of society based on sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, language, socioeconomic status, or other human differences so that they may be agents of social change throughout their lifetimes. (Jen)

Equipping our students with the skills and cultural competencies to thrive in today's world, and to de-center whiteness and (cis)hetero patriarchy from what they learn in school. (Quang)

Schools, curriculums, and policies that are oriented towards diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); that values multiple perspectives and do not endeavor to hide or distort history, particularly as it impacts people of marginalized identities. (Russell)

In a specific example, Quang spoke about how the cultural competencies he focuses on in his class on race and social justice might be relevant to the large numbers of AAPI students at his school:

I want to make sure that my students aren't subscribing to, you know, these kind of received ideas of what makes someone valuable or what makes someone worth it, including their own selves ... this idea that to be successful, you have to be a certain kind of Asian, you know, you have to make a certain kind of money, and have a certain kind of white collar job and, you know, all of that kind of thing, or like you can't do the arts because that's not what proper Asians do. You know, I, all of this is part and parcel of like giving them the vocabulary, and the tools, from which to rethink their place in the world. (Quang)

Participants talked about responsiveness in expansive ways, including the idea of SJE being inherently responsive to students' cultural contexts, an ever evolving world, allowing their

curricula and pedagogies to be dynamic and flexible so as to respond to current events and student-led inquiry, and being responsive to students' experiences and intellectual development.

Lemon described her approach to place-based education as validating students' lived experiences and cultural contexts:

When I think about social justice education, the first and foremost thing that comes to my mind is that we are honoring our students' lived experiences, we are going to ensure that whatever they participate in at home is mirrored in our classroom. That their funds of knowledge, their 'ohana structures, their 'ohana bubbles, even, and their cultural practices now and in the past, are recognized as educational and knowledgeable spaces in our classrooms. That is not just ... do you see science happening there? But it's like, how do we bring "there" [the worlds inhabited by students] "here" [to schools and classrooms] and make it very applicable, that what we do in the classroom reflects them. (Lemon)

Valerie described her definition of SJE as responding to the world, and how a fundamental aspect of being a social justice educator is the recognition that the world is always changing, so the definitions and implementations of SJE must also evolve.

The world is changing constantly and I'm being exposed to new things. And the students that come in my classroom are changing, and so I'm never going to be to the point of, you know, I've created the equitable space and be okay with that, because that's part of ... the lifelong learning. (Valerie)

Both Lemon (high school science) and Matt (high school English) said they respond to current events in their teaching. In addition, they also respond to students' interests and intellectual development. Lemon said about one of her place-based science units: "I don't have a

very clear path for it ever because I listen to my students, and I hear what they say, and like we go down tangents a lot.” In similar fashion, Matt spoke about how high school students’ minds should be growing and changing, and how he supports that:

For high school students ... they’re still figuring out who they are ... And so, as the, you know, as a teacher of current events, as a teacher of critical thinking, that's really exciting ... they’re like, actually, now that I'm thinking about this, I've changed my mind and I want to argue the exact opposite thing. And I tell them you know, that's awesome. Like, you have this ... adolescent brain ... yours is growing and growing and growing, and that's something to celebrate. That's what some of these assignments are, is for you to figure out who you are, what you believe. And if that’s changing, you're not doing something wrong, you’re doing something right ... The teaching has to be applicable to students’ lived lives. (Matt)

Quang spoke about the importance of English curriculum feeling relevant to his students:

I think it's really important ... that they don't think of English as being, you know, esoteric, and only, you know, you only talk about dead White people literature. I want it to feel vital and important for them as well. (Quang)

On deeper examination, it was also clear that participants often spoke about the importance of Hawai‘i as a place within their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE.

Responsiveness to Hawai‘i. Jen shared about maximizing opportunities for her students to deepen their learning about Hawai‘i as a unique place, even without direct curricular connections.

We did a ton of field trips over the years to places that celebrated Hawai‘i and its unique place ... I would just throw my class into any opportunity to do anything hands-on that celebrated Hawai‘i in terms of language, culture, history, and place. I wouldn’t wait for a field trip opportunity to align perfectly with the curriculum – I’d just go. The thought that went through my head was: How can I get students outside or out in the field as much as humanly possible so they can celebrate where we live? In retrospect, even though my units looked “sloppy” on paper, my students gained more than they ever could in terms of celebrating Hawai‘i as a place and Hawaiian identity than they could’ve had we remained in the classroom more often. I am proud of this! (Jen)

Lemon spoke primarily about place-based education specific to Hawai‘i in our conversation about SJE. It started with her own education when all of her projects were focused on Hawai‘i.

Everything I did was focused in Hawai‘i. And, because every theme was global, but the topic was local, I learned so much more about what this place is, and my connections to it.

So that’s what I do now. And that’s kind of what I focus on now with the kids.

She defined place-based education as having three components:

Place-based education is where we are, is who we are, and it’s who we are together. And that informs our location or places, that informs who we are and our identities, and it informs our cultures; place informs all of this. Place is not just a geographical location or an environmental location. It is our memories. It is our experiences right now, and are how we see our futures together. So, in every lesson, in every activity, if I’m steeping it in a place-based perspective, I make sure that I ask those three questions of myself. And I

ask those three questions of my students through their work, not explicitly, but through their work, when they identify those things. (Lemon)

For Mei, language, history, and place-based education are inextricable. She spoke about how the use of Hawaiian vocabulary in her place-based science curricula adds complexity and relevance:

I think there were certain things that I couldn't fully capture with English. So I chose to use Hawaiian to be able to bring in, I guess, multiple meanings, which is, I think, what I'm ultimately trying to do in all of my education work is to get away from like the binaries, that we, we often see to simplify things, and try to bring in nuance and complexity and layers. Because I feel like that makes it more real, and then, more applicable to things outside of just this specific lesson for this specific unit. (Mei)

Awareness of Outsider Status. Some participants spoke about an awareness of their outsider status in the context of implementing SJE in Hawai'i. Matt spoke about how teaching about Hawai'i was not his area of expertise, and that he was not qualified to teach these topics that are an important part of the school's goals for students.

There are some other parts of the cultural uniqueness of this place, particularly the Indigenous history of this place, that I'll always [be], and should be, on the outside looking in ... Some of those competencies are about, you know, 'aina-based, place-based learning and knowledge ... We have a lot of teachers who are, who are better at some things and not in others ... I'm not qualified, I don't have the knowledge to teach some of the students things that are really core to our mission. (Matt)

I'm bringing something, moving here, bringing something different than what is native and Indigenous to this place, and I have to be aware of that, if I want to make sure that I do my part and, maintaining who I am, but also to help perpetuate the culture, the ways of being, ways of knowing of this place. I could be one more space in Hawai'i, where either the Hawaiian language, culture, and ways of knowing and being dies, or I can be a space or place where all of that can live and continue on. And so I choose, actively choose, to be the latter. (Russell)

Yes, the immigration story is hard. The immigration story is challenging. And sometimes the narrative is, like, we need to survive as immigrants and we need to thrive in this new country, new neighborhood. But shifting that also to, while trying to figure out where you're going, to also giving back to the community that you, that you are settling in, right, because it's not fair for the people of this land, and the land itself, if you just keep taking from it without enriching it. And I think that kind of, that's my relationship with making sure that my work is enriching Hawai'i, not just taking from it all the time. (Pedro)

I didn't stay long enough to fully understand the the cultural context of Hawai'i and I know, it's really complex. So, you know, and I also can accept that I probably ... came in with, like, these conversations that I was having at a different institution, and a totally different cultural context, and I made some assumptions of like, oh, yeah, so this is a progressive school too, so we're in the same place of the conversation. (Valerie)

Grappling with Settler Colonialism. While talking about how they defined and conceptualized SJE, some participants explicitly mentioned an awareness of settler colonialism or Asian settler colonialism, and the complexities around these theories. They provided details on how such thinking shaped their work as educators. For example, Lemon described the complex thinking and growth of critical consciousness that occurred while reflecting on her previous science training and in graduate education coursework. She spoke about how these experiences shaped the diabetes curriculum she created, which was also a way of unpacking Asian settler colonialism.

Biology in 10th grade, it's the last time in your entire life that you will get a free education about your life, and about how to live well ... I would say that that is my kuleana as an educator, knowing the indirect harms that I may have caused to the community that I value, based on diabetes ... Because my hope is that students will take this in, will understand their biology. And will live healthfully throughout their life ... It makes me, like, just go through all this stuff, like, and unpack even more of the Asian settler colonialism that we experience ... all my past experiences, all my ritualistic learning of science has been questioned, which is why this diabetes curriculum comes about ... the reason why I share about this is because it's a tangible, it's a tangible example of my own problematization with Asian settler colonialism. (Lemon)

I'm a settler colonizer in this space, you know, and like, I never grew up thinking like that. But after hearing more about Native Hawaiian history, and, you know, just like really studying the timeline of how things went down, and then realizing that, hey, we are

like the White people in Hawai'i. You know, like Japanese people are the White people.

No wonder they hate us so much. You know, you don't really get it until you realize, like, the history. (Joanie)

Joanie describes this awareness of settler colonizer status as the motivation for her SJE focus, where she highlights Pacific Islander and Hawaiian representation with the AAPI category whenever possible:

Learning about different underserved communities, or marginalized communities, and using whatever abilities that I have to advocate for, and uplift these communities, so that there can be more equity. (Joanie)

For Juan, his complex thinking about Asian settler colonialism led to questions about how to build solidarity.

How do we empower ourselves in the context of Asian settler colonialism, of how to empower ourselves without, with, in solidarity, you know? ... Because a lot of Filipinos are empowered in our American identity, in American ideologies ... proud to be American, right. And so how do we find empowerment and, and really, um, develop a sense of social justice, not only for ourselves, but in solidarity with other marginalized groups, right? How do we learn about each other? ... Like, let's learn about why, what brought Chuukese and Marshallese here, what was the American ... events or influence that brought them here, the bombing of whatever, right. Why did Filipinos come here, learn about it, right. What does it mean for Asians to be here in the, in terms of oppression, of like, if we learn about each other, I think we would have more empathy and more solidarity. (Juan)

At the same time, Juan's goal as educator is to address issues relating to Filipinos in education:

I got to look at the Filipinos. No one's looking at us. And still not forget that I have my Native Hawaiian students and ... and a lot of Chuukese and Marshallese ... It's not just about my Filipino students. It's really about all of our students in the margins who feel in the margins and don't see themselves at all. (Juan)

Matt speaks about applying his awareness of Hawai'i's settler colonial history in his literature courses.

I try and be thoughtful about that, I try, and because of our settler colonial history, my learning this history in my late 30s and early 40s still means that I know more about a lot of these stories, at least from a conventional historical perspective, and literary historical perspective, than my students did, because they've never been taught these stories ... I do things in many of my classes that ask them to talk about _____'s (the school's) relationship to that history of annexation and overthrow, and as you know, that relationship is deep and intimate, and many of the, many of the buildings are named after either the family members or the actual architects of overthrow. (Matt)

Only one participant talked about explicitly teaching the theory of Asian settler colonialism as part of his implementation of SJE. Punana described in detail a classroom discussion he had with high school seniors after reading about Asian settler colonialism. A student spoke about how Hawai'i is his home:

Because my parents, my great-grandparents came here. During the plantation, they worked here in the cane fields, right? They, so that my family has been here generations, right, over here. So therefore, because my family has been here for generations, right?

They worked hard. They didn't, you know, do anything bad. They worked hard, you know.

Punana shared more about other students' responses to the reading he assigned:

That's the whole Asian narrative, right? The heroic narrative, right, which Candace [Fujikane] talks about in her book ... The wrong thing about it is that, one, one girl said, like, "It's at the expense of another group. Asians have succeeded, yes, they worked hard, it doesn't take anything away. But it came at the expense of, you know, another marginalized group that I don't think you're aware of" ... "We've all benefited from the illegal act of 1893 as settlers, and that sometimes the onus and the [blame] goes towards the Whites. But Asians, we just, had benefited just as much as them even though we may not have committed the crime" ... but telling someone this place isn't their's when they grew up here, was, was uncomfortable for, I think, some of the Asian students over there, that they had to wrestle with. (Punana)

In a subsequent discussion, Punana draws various strands together to define settler colonialism for his students.

There are concepts that I put on the board today. There was, it was occupation, settler colonialism, there's occupation, settler colonialism, militarism ... a lot of what settler colonial[ism] is [is] occupying, right, is occupying militarily, economically, politically, the country ... And then I talked about, I kind of talked about settler colonialism in three words. I said, displace, replace, erase ... what settler colonialism is basically about, you know, you displace the Natives in their own place. You replace them with non-Natives, or settlers. And over time, you erase the existence of the Native peoples that are in that

place. And because a lot of us are settlers, we contribute to the idea of erasing the Native peoples in their Native land. (Punana)

Issues of ‘Āina, Sovereignty, and Militarization of Hawai‘i.

Many participants spoke more specifically about issues relating to ‘āina, sovereignty, and militarization of Hawai‘i as social justice issues that they addressed in their teaching.

I believe in the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement and aloha ‘āina. (Juan)

Anything that has to do about the history of Hawai‘i, and Hawaiians, and this place, means more to me than anything I teach. (Punana)

Social justice means fighting for what is pono in all avenues of life. In my classroom, I often focus on environmental social justice within Waianae. (Ulu)

_____ (name of teacher colleague) will always involve me if it has to do with ...

Hawaiian studies or takes place in Hawai‘i and, you know, activism. She knows like, those are the topics I’m interested in ... And, yeah, I just became involved because she [the teacher colleague] knew that ... it’s [the Red Hill fuel leak] a topic that I care about ...

I helped arrange the guest speakers. I brainstormed guest speakers, and I reached out to people, and I have made connections through, you know, going to protests and stuff. So that was kind of what I brought to the table in terms of that. A lot of kids were coming to me with one-on-one research help for that. (Ahuli‘i)

A few participants also talked specifically about addressing the U.S. military presence in Hawai‘i as part of their implementations of SJE. Punana described students viewing and discussing the documentary *Noho Hewa*, which helped him make connections between past and current events relating to the military in Hawai‘i.

How many military bases you can name on the island of O‘ahu ... And I was like, brah, and how big is O‘ahu? You know, I mean, like per capita, per size, shoot, is there another place more militarized than us? And then so we kind of looked at the Navy's history ... But we're going to talk about Kaho‘olawe ... they knew about ... Red Hill ... And I said, look, 1893. They’ve been here for how long? ... The Massey case too was the Navy ... So yeah, so, I was trying to connect the dots to them about the military presence, especially the Navy’s over here, and connect it to Red Hill, right. I go, this is key. This is still going on. (Punana)

In the context of a unit on aloha ‘āina, Ahuli‘i spoke about the big ideas that she hoped would stay with students, and why it mattered in the longer term:

The big ideas that I thought would be important for them to hold on to as they get older, that they latched on to, which is good. You know, like, the lease for Pōhakuloa expires in 2029. They will be 18 when it’s 2029. And, you know, maybe they’ll be able to vote at that time. And so having this knowledge now, I think, you know, hopefully, we’ll have them looking out for that as they make informed choices as a voter. (Ahuli‘i)

Mei situates current challenges and historical contexts in her place-based curriculum, posing questions to students around ‘āina, militarization, and justice issues.

So there's a lot of opportunities when you're on site to talk about how everything is connected. So why is it dirty? Why do you have to remediate? What is the history of the space? Why can't you go in the water? Military occupation, Pearl Harbor, World War Two. There's also conversations that happen really easily around the rhinoceros beetle and invasive species introduction, and that also goes back to the military. And then there's very clearly like, a homelessness problem. And there's, like, crime that happens there. And those conversations, right, all of it is connected. So, why don't people have places to live? Why don't they have food to eat? Why can't you go in the water? Why can't you eat the food? Why can't you grow things here? Like where is the water? ... And so I think, for me, I think those two lessons where you get that historical understanding, and then the cultural significance understanding, helps to provide an alternative view to places like Pu'uloa that have been wastelanded or that are occupied, or that are generally just sectioned off from the general population. (Mei)

Ulu also uses historical context to clarify what aloha 'āina means in her SJE and environmental science teaching:

The term aloha 'āina started from our kupuna throughout the Kū'ē petitions, like when we were trying to fight the illegal occupation of Hawai'i. And a lot of people don't want to mention that because it's too controversial. So I guess that's one thing I would define, there's a difference between place-based, culture-based, ... [and] aloha 'āina, where everything is driven by this idea of like, we need to restore 'āina. And we need to become an independent nation again, so we can make our own governing rules on how to take care of our 'āina, how to take care of our place, our home ... It needs to be focused on,

like, we are still here fighting for our independence. And that is the focus of aloha ‘āina. Without ‘āina, and without us having that governance, whatever we do is just playing cards with the Western side of things ... But it’s definitely like a message I put out there [to families]. It is definitely a message. Like it starts off with, like, we're nothing without our ‘āina. And then it's like, we need to be empowered and making these decisions. (Ulu)

Juan articulated what some other participants said about SJE being a broad umbrella term for the more specific instances of anti-oppressive work they were engaged in:

The overarching theories is social justice, right? Social justice, culturally responsive teaching, pedagogy, right, critical consciousness, like all of these theories, decolonization, like, whenever we think about teaching, or teaching practice, curriculum, like, those are always there. (Juan)

Providing some contrast is Arita’s definition of social justice, which she thinks is different from the type of education she engages in at her Hawaiian-focused charter school, one that seeks recognition for Hawaiian history, rights, and concerns outside of an existing American system. In the survey, Arita said she identified as an educator engaged in decolonizing or anti-colonizing education, but not with social justice education. According to Arita, the mission at her school is to:

facilitate individual and community healing and empowerment by fostering lifelong learners who think and act in ways that are pono ... Students recognize strengths and address challenges as they seek positive systemic change in their local, regional, and global communities ... So it’s like, to build on the foundation. So, it’s building on

ancestral knowledge and practices, exploring and acquiring ways that build on ancestral wisdom to bridge communities. (Arita)

She elaborated on why she felt more alignment with decolonizing or anti-colonial education rather than social justice education:

I think [what] makes a difference is I feel like social justice feels like you're ... trying to be equal Americans, versus people who are marginalized because they've been colonized. Like, I feel like when you look, when you read Hawaiian, like Kānaka crit, we read that one [article] by Reyes, that author. So she did that Kānaka crit theory. Critical race theory, it has different goals I think, and then it's not, it's not to be [an] equal American. And it's to, like, be a Hawaiian ... But I just feel like there's that difference in trying to participate in an American system, or one that's trying to reclaim another culture, or another viewpoint, or another point of view, or another perspective, where I feel like social justice is like, how do we gain access in the system that already exists? And then the other one is like, how do we change this system to not be the only valuable system? (Arita)

Mei also spoke about a more complex definition of SJE, which needs historical contexts and an understanding of systems in order for place-based education to attain social justice or decolonizing goals:

When you do it well, it can be all of those things ... Place-based education isn't always social justice education, and it's not always decolonizing. I think it requires that you have or you bring in some kind of historical understanding, and then bring in the systems understanding into why things are the way they are, and then bring it into how you can

make change, or how you can collectively make change. So I feel like all of those components have to be there ... Because I think especially in Hawai‘i, our land based struggles, intersectionality, yeah, affects, you know, class, race; everything is kind of overlapping in Hawai‘i. (Mei)

Awareness of Systems, Structures, and Histories

Many respondents described injustice as related to systems, structures, or histories, which I grouped under one theme because these conceptions of SJE go beyond individual persons, circumstances, places, or times. For example, respondents defined SJE in the following ways:

Social justice education aims to create awareness and build toward action in understanding the systemic issues in our society that have created the current inequities. It should enable students to not just see their own surroundings, but the broader systems and mental models in play. (Respondent 8)

Teaching students about the past, as well as about social structures and forces which benefit or harm people based on their ethnicity or other identity. (Respondent 10)

An approach to education with the mentality to create equal access and belonging for all ... with an exploration into systemic and power structures within an institution. (Respondent 12)

Participants talked about the importance of addressing or dismantling systemic oppression as part of SJE:

Social justice education is a process, through curriculum and/or pedagogy, to identify inequalities in society forced on people by systemic oppression, policies and/or any source of power and to provide students learning experiences to resist and challenge those inequalities and those in power in society. Ultimately, social justice education allows students to address injustice/systemic oppression and empower students with the skills to make change in their lives and communities. (Juan)

Teaching students to be critical of structures and systems that oppress members of society based on sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, language, socioeconomic status, or other human differences so that they may be agents of social change throughout their lifetimes. (Jen)

Several participants mentioned history in talking about oppressive systems:

It's important to provide lenses for students to recognize and understand that ways that power structures and historical context impact their lives. Social justice education also helps give students tools to dismantle oppressive systems. (Mei)

Education aimed at correcting historical underrepresentation and misrepresentation of marginalized groups; the stories of those missed in historical master narratives.

(Respondent 4)

As we saw above, some conceptualizations of SJE address the interlocking nature of justice issues with histories, systems, and place. Mei spoke about how SJE must have both historical and systems understandings in order for it to also address injustices from colonization:

When you do it well, it can be all of those things. But I think it's not always. Place-based education isn't always social justice education, and it's not always decolonizing. I think it requires that you have, or you bring in some kind of historical understanding, and then bring in the systems understanding into why things are the way they are, and then bring it into how you can make change, or how you can collectively make change. So, I feel like all of those components have to be there. (Mei)

Making Connections, Transcending Boundaries

In defining SJE, educators often made connections or spoke about the importance of making connections in different ways. Several participants spoke about transcending disciplinary boundaries as an important part of SJE. Alex was drawn to his current position because the interdisciplinary, project-based approach appealed to him:

I saw that it was [a] very interdisciplinary focus, and it was all about project-based learning. And to me, it aligned a lot with how I had my college education, which was very interdisciplinary and very, like, driven by questions. It's a, you know, it's an inquiry-focused school. So, every course has an essential question. And I didn't feel like, based on what I saw, it was nearly as much, like, rote content, factfinding kind of learning, which was exciting to me. (Alex)

Lemon spoke about rejecting the silo of Western science in her approach to place-based science:

Obviously, we cannot live in a silo of Western science. We cannot live in a silo of we're only going to do Indigenous science, because Indigenous science is like a study of everything.

We spoke in late May of 2022, and she recounted pointing out to students that the anticipated U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Roe vs. Wade was not an issue separate from environmental science, because it has significant consequences in human outcomes.

My students came to me and were like, we can't find an environmental science topic to write about for current events. And I was like ... just look at two, just look at Roe versus Wade, and the overturning of Roe versus Wade, and look at the baby, the infant formula shortage. Those two things are going to drastically impact human outcomes ... my kids are like, Oh, this is like social science, but society is science. Like, that's, they have to go hand in hand. (Lemon)

Connections across disciplinary boundaries are fundamental to how Mei designs her place-based science curricula and how she thinks about SJE, which she defined as:

... environmental justice, social justice issues, with this backbone of historical cultural context, through time, with the aim that at the end of learning about history, context, how people have come and gone from this urban area, like, how we use our land now, and then visioning into the future, what they want, and then those discussions of what it would take to get there. (Mei)

She elaborated on how making connections with histories and other contexts relates to critical thinking and developing better relationships with places and people.

And the pathway that I took to get here is that all of this is connected, and it's all really important ... And I've diagnosed it in my head, simply, oversimplified it as, you know, just a lack of critical awareness and critical thinking skills. And I'm hoping, probably naively, that a historical, contextual understanding will help to pare away or slough off

some of these really basic misunderstandings and unhealthy relationships with places and people. (Mei)

She believes there is a lot at stake in breaking down the disciplinary silos:

What is missing from most of these conversations ... is I don't think people are seeing the way that things are tangled and connected. And they try to silo problems, right. So how do we deal with racism? We deal with racism. Or how do we deal with environmental degradation? We deal with environmental degradation. But I feel like the underlying misunderstandings or underlying missing components are similar for both. And I feel like that's what I want to point out ... to do the work, you do all of it. Like if you're going to do decolonial, environmental, social [justice] work, like you're doing all of it at the same time, like, you heal community when you heal lands, when you make these plans to adapt into the future, like you have to be doing it all. Because if we pull the same problems into the future by just siloing things, then we're left with the same problems, and then we all die, honestly. (Mei)

Mei also believes in breaking down barriers that separate people and land:

I feel like these, these conversations about environment, and about place and land, I think translate really well to conversations about people ... We're like, having conversations to understand one another. Yeah, I feel like that's similar to what you would do with places. And that's the similar tactic toward, you know, tearing down walls between communities, or between people, and tearing down like stereotypes, and other, you know, ways to create others ... ways to separate from one another, and ways to make hierarchy. (Mei)

Juan describes the typical structure of many of his units at a Hawaiian-focused charter school, how he connects the learning around Hawaiian cultural artifacts, science, advocacy, and community enrichment.

It's like, how do we have these artifacts, these products, projects, that become, that are tied to science, mainly towards biology, ecology, and then culture, identity ... and then that action part, what can I do? ... It's like, the action part is always a part of it, too ... there has to be some type of action ... they looked at legislation ... What are some legislation that are, that deals with the protection of the birds, and one of them was ... 'a'ole mosquito campaign ... I gave them the legislation, they read it. And then they wrote to the legislators to support this bill that would help eradicate mosquitoes. Yeah. And so you know, being that action part and being part of advocacy for the birds, right, empowered [them] to make change of some sort ... They can't use these traditional birds anymore, that what you saw [at the] Bishop Museum are traditional feathers, and that it was plentiful. And now we can't do that. But do we just stop your cultural practices? No, like, you should continue it. But you got to know that there are implications to not protecting the birds and maybe your children may not have these birds anymore. (Juan)

As librarian, Ahuli'i spoke about diversity, representation, inclusiveness, and democratic engagement as important ideas in how she supports classrooms instruction, develops media literacy within the community, and curates books for the school's library. Her thinking about SJE connects various ideas around ableism, fatphobia, transphobia, and white supremacy.

Studying issues of ableism in children's literature is something I'm very passionate about because I had a theater professor who did disability studies as it pertains to theater. And

that was incredibly interesting. She's one of my heroes. Her, her academic work was, her scholarship was really inspiring to me. And so, then I started, like, really thinking about ableism as it pertains to education, and then of course, how it pertains to children's literature as well. And I think, like, that is something we can continue to think about as we think about inclusion and equity, like ableism and all of its forms, you know? ... I think it [fatphobia], maybe it is born out of ableism, because it's sort of a symptom of the same ideas about a normative body, right? ... I would argue it's all connected to white supremacy, and that there is a perfect normative body that we all are measuring ourselves against. So I think ableism and fatphobia are somewhat connected ... The fatphobia just kind of came out of like, me reading and actually rereading some of ... I used to love Harry Potter, and then, like, with all of the J. K. Rowling TERF stuff, you know ... examining ... J. K. Rowling's work and where actually, like, prejudice does bubble through. There's a ton of fatphobia in Harry Potter and there's a ton of fatphobia in Roald Dahl books. And I think people are sort of hesitant to revisit what we consider, like, the canon but, but I think it's, there are some people writing about it. I was able to find some really great blog posts about, like, fatphobia in children's literature, and that's where I was able to find some research, but it's not as prevalent as like, examining race in children's literature, or examining, even ableism has more of a conversation around it.

(Ahuli'i)

Ahuli'i spoke about the potential impact on transgender readers for an author of children's literature to have bioessentialist views on gender:

She [Rowling] took an incredibly bioessentialist stance on gender ... It's all very trans exclusionary, it's all very bioessentialist ways of thinking about gender ... Which is really disappointing, right? I, you know, from my perspective, someone with those views, I don't necessarily want children's literature or, you know, children to read literature that's written by someone who has such a narrow view of gender, and also there are trans children certainly reading Harry Potter, you know. And that's, that would be devastating ... That, that *is* devastating.

In our conversation, Russell emphasized that he actively makes connections by bringing Hawaiian stories, histories, and practices into his high school Spanish classroom.

I think that the way that I approach my Spanish class is, like, whatever we are doing, we're in Hawai'i and so it should connect to Hawai'i, right? ... I'm tasked with helping them to acquire Spanish language and, learning to navigate the Spanish, the cultures that exist in the Spanish speaking world. But also ... I do think it is also my duty to perpetuate Hawaiian things even through my Spanish class, and so yeah, the connection is never far away, and I think that they respond positively to that. (Russell)

He connects this idea of situating his Spanish instruction in Hawai'i to the idea of social justice, and his awareness of his role here:

I guess to to bring it back to ... more social justice ... The reason why I do all of that is, you know, because I always have it in the back of my mind, and I hope that my students are always aware that, you know, here in particular, in Hawai'i, there have been injustice[s] particularly enacted upon the Hawaiian people, and so, you know, it is, it is our responsibility to move forward and try to make that right in whatever way we can,

and, you know, up to this point, my way of doing that has been to try to perpetuate Hawaiian things. (Russell)

For some educators, their discipline is inherently connected to social justice and not a separate subject.

It became very quickly apparent to me that you can't teach American literature and not talk about the multiracial experience in America. You're not teaching American literature if you don't do that. (Matt)

Matt actively integrates a social justice lens into every aspect of his teaching, since it is not separate from his work as English teacher:

I wouldn't be an Americanist if I wasn't interested in thinking about how we tell our story, how we're imbricated in our own history. I wouldn't study... I wouldn't do literary history if I didn't think the stories we tell ourselves now were influenced by the stories we've told ourselves in the past. I mean, ... this is the work, right? So, it's not like, oh, I'm doing this special brand of teaching ... In terms of social justice training, I've got my Ph.D. but I don't know that I did social justice training, really, ever. Yeah, ... it's always been part of the work. (Matt)

Throughout this theme, participants described their experiences of thinking more expansively about their work as educators, often making connections across traditional boundaries as part of their social justice thinking.

Conclusion: How do K-12 educators in Hawai'i define and conceptualize SJE?

Participants defined SJE in ways that emphasized equity as an underlying concern. Equity is a primary goal of SJE, which involves empowering students, responding to issues of

identity, and building critical skills and awareness around justice, which includes an awareness of systems and structures that reinforce injustice. Drawing on interview data, where participants elaborated on their definitions and conceptualizations of SJE, I generated themes with greater specificity. Equity is a core concern of SJE, attained through various forms of empowerment of students, educators, and communities. The goal of such empowerment is action and advocacy that addresses oppressive systems and structures. Gaining skills and knowledge is a form of empowerment, along with civic engagement. The goal of such empowerment is to heal, enrich, and sustain communities. Educators also spoke about the importance of educator empowerment in the enactment of SJE.

Participants spoke about the importance of being responsive to identities in SJE. In addition, they also elaborated on the idea of responsiveness to Hawai‘i as a place, which included grappling with outsider status, settler colonialism, and historical and ongoing injustices around ‘āina, sovereignty, and militarization of Hawai‘i. Participants also spoke about critical awareness around systems, structures, and histories that have created or reinforced injustices as an important part of SJE, and how SJE required the ability to make connections and transcend existing boundaries and practices.

In the next chapter I examine the significance of these findings in the context of the literature around SJE, the implications for K-12 education and research around SJE, the limitations of this study, and possible avenues of future research in this area.

CHAPTER 5: SIGNIFICANCE, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the implications of the findings related to the two research questions: what experiences shaped participants' orientation toward social justice education (SJE) in Hawai'i, and how they define and conceptualize SJE in their current work as educators. I identify connections between the findings, the literature on SJE, and the framework of settler colonialism. These connections provide a foundation for my recommendations around SJE practice in Hawai'i, with identity-affirming education as a focal point. Finally, I include an analysis of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Within the main idea that SJE must be identity-affirming, I define "identity" as inclusive of social locations and relationships to place, contexts, people, and communities. In this study, K-12 social justice educators in Hawai'i spoke about situated, relational identities as important factors that shaped their orientation towards SJE. Participants also described experiences around identity that honed their awareness around SJE. Many of these experiences involved erasure or devaluation of identities in some way: the lack of diversity in schooling experiences, school segregation, pressure to assimilate as part of dominant cultures, explicit erasure or devaluation of identities, and curricular gaps around Hawaiian history.

Participants spoke about complex processes through which they gained critical consciousness about social justice. Some sought out certain types of learning, or put themselves in situations where they would be exposed to non-dominant voices or social justice ideas. Consciousness-raising processes were often non-linear and non-consecutive in the sense that years may have passed between a specific experience and the participant thinking about that

experience in the context of greater critical awareness. Many spoke about developing awareness around structural, systemic, or historical inequities as a factor that shaped their social justice thinking. The various factors above may have occurred in personal, schooling, or professional contexts.

With regards to how participants defined and conceptualized SJE in their work as educators, my findings indicated that K-12 social justice educators in Hawai‘i defined SJE with a primary concern for equity. Educators also saw empowerment as an essential element of striving for equity. The goal of empowerment is so that students can take action and become advocates for social justice, through the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and through civic engagement in democratic contexts. Empowerment through SJE served to enrich, elevate, and heal communities beyond the individual, classroom, school. Educators also spoke about ways in which SJE empowered them and other educators.

K-12 social justice educators in Hawai‘i also believed that responsiveness to identity is important in defining and implementing SJE. They spoke specifically about their relationships to Hawai‘i as a place, in the context of defining and implementing SJE. There was a range in how and how much participants’ definitions of SJE addressed specific injustices in Hawai‘i, including those stemming from the colonization and occupation of Hawai‘i. Some spoke about their outsider status as a consideration in how they defined and implemented SJE. Some spoke about their awareness of settler colonialism and Asian settler colonialism, and described how they continued to think about and grapple with settler awareness in their SJE work. Participants who focused primarily on issues of Hawaiian survivance and self-determination spoke about specific issues affecting ‘āina, Hawaiian sovereignty, and militarization.

Many participants also spoke about the importance of teaching students to be aware of systems, structures, and histories that perpetuate injustice, and nurturing skills and opportunities for them to recognize and address structures of oppression. Finally, participants also spoke about how SJE must make connections and transcend boundaries, especially those separating traditional academic disciplines. The following sections detail the significance of these findings in the areas explored by the two research questions, in the context of the research literature.

Significance of Experiences that Shaped Participants' Orientations Towards SJE

In light of the literature around the centrality of student and teacher identity in social justice teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Pugach et al., 2019), it is not surprising that participants in this study spoke about experiences around their own identities, and the identities of others, as important factors shaping their orientations towards SJE. While some participants spoke about identity-affirming experiences, many participants spoke about having experienced or witnessed various types of devaluation or erasure around identity, culture, or place that honed their awareness of systemic or historical injustices. It is also not surprising that participants often spoke about their own educational experiences, from elementary school through graduate school, as frequent contexts in which these experiences with identity and social justice consciousness took place. In other words, participants spoke about their own education as spaces of oppression as well as liberation (Picower, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Being an educator with an orientation towards SJE also seemed to allow participants to connect their identities and lived experiences.

Going a little deeper, the findings also suggested that identity for many participants included situated and relational aspects, i.e., relationships to people and place. Relationality is “an indelible feature of Indigenous research and Indigenous studies” (Tuck et al., 2018).

Relationality is also central in the field of education, where “much of what we are looking at ... [in] educational research, is engaging in and simultaneously seeking to know more about relationships and relationality” (Tuck et al., 2018). More specifically, in the settler colonial context of Hawai‘i, it is important to acknowledge the interconnected and reciprocal relationships and responsibilities to living and non-living things, and to people and āina, that are important aspects of who people are (Kaomea, 2009; Makaiau, 2017; Meyer, 2016). In particular, Makaiau (2017) pointed to place identity as an important aspect of identity exploration for adolescents in Hawai‘i, along with ethnic and gender identity.

This importance of situated and relational identities suggested that instead of looking at a list of familiar identity markers like race, ethnicity, sex, gender, or class (Pugach et al., 2019), or exploring these separately, SJE framings of identity should consider how mo‘okū‘auhau, one’s connections to people, places, and spaces, defines “diverse pathways and relationships” in different contexts (Balutski & Wright, 2016, p. 93). In other words, identity is more than a list of identity markers that may intersect. Instead, identity can be defined as an assemblage of social locations that includes “coordinates of social, physical, and ethical locations” and “ongoing responsibilities and relations among peoples, places, and practices” (Patel, 2016, pp. 5, 57).

When I invited participants to speak about their life histories with a focus on any elements that shaped or informed their SJE consciousness, almost all participants spoke about experiences that began before their university education or teacher training experiences. These findings add to the research about the importance of personal experiences in how teachers develop, think about, and implement SJE awareness (Baily & Katradis, 2016; Belknap, 2020; Freire, 2021; Kelly-Jackson, 2015; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). While participants may have

mentioned some social justice related content or conversations in their teacher training experiences, most spoke about other things beyond formal teacher training programs as informing their SJE orientation. Very few spoke about being trained specifically for SJE. As such, scholars interested in understanding and assessing teacher awareness and preparation for SJE should explore experiences beyond teacher education programs or teacher development. For example, Matt attained an advanced degree in American literature and saw social justice as inextricably connected to his work as an English teacher rather than a separate or special type of teaching. The wide variety of disciplines among the participants also suggests that SJE does not have to be limited by or defined within the existing boundaries of established disciplines like literature, social studies, world languages, or science. Below I elaborate on some of the major findings and implications for experiences shaping teacher orientations towards SJE.

Social Justice Education is Identity-Affirming, Situated, and Relational

Participants spoke with profound feeling about experiences that affirmed and grounded their identities, as well as disidentification and identity devaluation, both of which contributed to the development of social justice thinking among the participants. Throughout the process of collecting, analyzing, thinking, and writing about the experiences participants shared, many of their words and stories stuck with me. In particular, I was struck by the deep sadness around Juan's disidentification with Filipino identity: "I didn't have a sense of identity at all," especially in contrast with how Ahuli'i said "I am Hawaiian first" in sharing her development of social justice consciousness. These and related accounts from the participants suggest the importance of identity affirmation in SJE, and for these social justice educators, manifested in ways that led them to include and prioritize identity affirming opportunities for their students in their

implementations of SJE. For Ahuli‘i, a focus on diverse representation in library books is one way she affirms diverse identities. For Juan, his growing awareness around the past erasure and devaluation of working-class Filipino identity in education led him to study Ilocano, read histories, seek out opportunities to work with Filipino students, and to advocate for Filipino curriculum. Juan’s focus on the inequities for Filipinos in educational contexts is a concern in the existing literature (Halagao, 2010, 2016).

Participants also spoke at length about experiences and observations of injustice, lack, erasure, or devaluation around identities in schools. They identified how their current implementations of SJE were in response to past experiences relating to identity. For example, a few participants mentioned a lack of diversity in early schooling as a backdrop for their later development towards SJE. For participants like Alex, schooling was traumatic and provided a negative example for SJE; in other words, it made him want to be the supportive, inclusive educator he wished he had had in school. As a student, Ulu struggled to understand the racist remarks people made about her Micronesian classmates. As an adult, she continued to hear such comments from adult peers. These encounters with anti-Micronesian racism from childhood through adulthood were part of what motivated Ulu to become a supportive teacher who rejects deficit narratives. A major catalyst for Punana’s development of SJE consciousness was the realization that his otherwise good education had failed to include the history of the overthrow and annexation of Hawai‘i, an omission he now calls “curricular neglect.” He hopes that his own children get a better education in “knowing who they are,” which he connects directly to a grounding in Hawaiian history. Part of his own ongoing learning now includes learning ‘olelo Hawai‘i, which he described as something that could help him contribute to the lāhui, aligning

with the idea of a strategic assertion of collective Hawaiian identity in resistance to “American discourses of assimilation and citizenship” (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2016, p. 7).

The experiences above included a devaluation of identities for participants themselves or others around them, serving as conscientization calls towards greater sociopolitical awareness (Freire, 2021; Kelly-Jackson, 2015). In many cases, participants also spoke about feeling pressure to assimilate within dominant cultures. For example, Mei expressed profound sadness about how her tutu had been beaten for speaking Hawaiian in school, and how strongly her tutu discouraged her from studying Hawaiian language. She was also steered away from pursuing Hawaiian cultural paths at school. Similarly, Joanie was discouraged from studying Hawaiian language and culture because it was deemed less valuable in a Western educational system. These accounts add complexity and nuance to SJE research, especially where the question of multiple, intersecting identities in teachers is underexplored and thus insufficient for addressing the multiple identities of teachers and students (Pugach et al., 2019).

Participants often connected their approaches to SJE with a fundamental value or aspect of their own identities, like being Buddhist (Naoko), an early sense of right and wrong (Jenn, Valerie), or acting on the gut sense of pono and humility (Punana). While Russell’s double consciousness is not part of his identity per se, he did acquire it through existing as a Black person in the United States. He brings this awareness of complex identities and perceptions with him as a transplant educator to Hawai‘i, and applies it in ways to deepen his understandings of people and place.

When participants spoke about their feelings around SJE, they also shared feelings of hope and optimism around whether their efforts would make a difference in the justice issues

faced by their communities. In conversations with Mei, there was deep sadness when she spoke about family trauma due to colonizing ideas that devalued her multiple identities, and her fluctuating feelings of hope with regards to protecting ‘āina from further pollution, extraction, and degradation. However, she has found community among activists and educators with shared concerns. Ahuli‘i also spoke about militarization in Hawai‘i as an issue she had been caring about since her youth. She acknowledged the possibility of being cynical about the continued U.S. military occupation of Hawai‘i, but also recognized that cynicism and nihilism were unproductive in SJE, and could not be shared with students. She believes that there is no choice but to be hopeful, which she experienced through empowering students while teaching about the Red Hill fuel leak.

These examples suggested that a phenomenological approach exploring experiences beyond teacher training programs or discrete teacher development opportunities can provide rich information about teacher dispositions around radical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) and the role of emotions in SJE as part of the wholly-engaged countour of the Justice as Praxis Framework (Bondy et al., 2017; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). These experiences also highlighted educators’ awareness of the potential of education for both oppression and liberation (Picower, 2012; Yosso, 2005), and that problem-posing education can build critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, the ways in which participants spoke about SJE around specific places like Maunakea, Wai‘anae, Pōhakuloa, Red Hill, or Pu‘uloa, in specific historical or political contexts, enacts a form of relationality that is about accountability to “land, water, and the more-than-human world,” and also about regeneration and futurity (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 22). In various ways, these educators are enacting their aloha ‘āina and kuleana, which suggests a strong familial

bond and the responsibility, burden, and privilege of caring for specific places and spaces (Balutski & Wright, 2016).

Complex Conscientization Processes and Seeing Systems

Existing scholarship supports the idea that teachers draw on their personal lived experiences in their SJE pedagogies (Baily & Katradis, 2016; Belknap, 2020; Freire, 2021; Kelly-Jackson, 2015; Menna et al., 2022; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). More specifically, Freire (1970) defined conscientization as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 17). Conscientization is thus a development of awareness that leads to the ability to perceive structural forces of oppression in the world (Freire, 2021). Freire (2021) used the term “conscientization calls” for “lessons individuals learn related to injustice and inequity affecting minoritized populations ... [which can serve as] stepping stones towards the development of sociopolitical consciousness and social justice commitment” (p. 233). These conscientization calls could be through personal or observed experiences, at micro or macro levels (Freire, 2021).

Sometimes conscientization occurred after re-examining a past experience with more recently-acquired awareness in ways that honed their critical consciousness. Within this study, these experiences usually occurred outside of teacher training programs or discrete, one-time experiences like workshops or courses. While two participants spoke about graduate school readings that opened the “floodgates” of their social justice and identity awareness, very few participants spoke about such intellectual developments as the result of a single, discrete experience, occurring in a single place, time, or program. This overlaps with the idea that teacher education for social justice “cannot be done in one course or one module, but rather must occur

in a cyclical and iterative process that offers dialogue, debate, and description in an effort to engage teachers in an authentic manner” (Baily & Katradis, 2016, p. 226). In addition, it adds to the scholarship by highlighting the non-linear ways in which these conscientization experiences occur.

Many participants also mentioned encounters with influential educators, readings, coursework, colleagues, or events in schooling or professional experiences as conscientization calls, starting with family life, elementary school, and going through graduate school and teaching experiences. In addition, participants spoke about seeing systems, structures, and histories of injustice as part of their growth in critical consciousness (Freire, 2021), which is also evidence of complex systems understanding of social justice on the theoretical level (Belknap, 2020; Cochran-Smith, 2010).

Some participants spoke about inherent motivations to seek out growth in critical consciousness, by putting themselves in particular environments or pursuing particular experiences related to their interests within SJE (Joanie, Ahuli‘i, Juan, Punana). In particular, Punana spoke about the value of humility, that many educators may be “quiet warriors” who may be engaged in SJE without labeling it SJE or drawing attention to their work. Valerie spoke about a constant openness and willingness to evolve in ongoing ways, along with her growing awareness of social justice, and as students’ needs evolve. This openness and the self-motivated pursuit of ongoing SJE learning by many participants resonates with the “immersed in inquiry” contour of the Justice as Praxis Framework and the dispositions of radical openness and humility around what educators know and believe to be SJE (Bondy et al., 2017). This disposition, along with the responsiveness to students, place, and culture that many participants spoke of, is also

resonant with Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck's conception of education as a field that "embraces and anticipates change" and "pivots on how change happens and how our efforts as humans can bring about the changes we want to see" (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 8).

Often, participants spoke about seeing and understanding structures of power at play with regard to social injustice, and how more recent learning about such systems and structures gave them greater insight into their own past experiences. This resonates with the critical sociological dimension of the Justice as Praxis framework, where "injustice is embedded in systems such that locating and transforming it requires that people look for its historical and sociocultural roots" (Bondy et al., 2017, p. 6), and shows that participants have the complex systems understandings of social justice necessary to enact transformative change that disrupts systems of oppression (Belknap, 2020; Cochran-Smith, 2010). At the level of both practice and research, the term "social justice" means that practitioners "understand that inequities are produced, inequities are structured, and that things have got to change in order to achieve different educational outcomes." (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 5)

In fact, participants described complex, personal conscientization experiences where a combination of experiences, occurring at different times and stemming from different sources, worked together for a participant like Mei to start seeing a "bigger picture" around her personal, family, and schooling experiences. She spoke about a shift away from a "really individualized understanding of responsibility, action, and consequence" to seeing larger systems at work. The entrenched and complex nature of the systems that shaped her thinking took "a lot of ... peeling away" but this process ultimately had a healing effect by releasing her from feelings of blame towards self, family, and community. Jen realized that "there were these systems and forces at

play” in ways that shaped her upbringing, putting her and her sister in situations that were “wrong.” This and later realizations shaped her curiosity around how and why things are the way they are. Valerie also spoke about a formative experience where she learned that the system of White supremacy was designed to benefit her and oppress others, and that as a White person she had a responsibility to dismantle such inequities.

Lemon’s account of coming to new realizations led her to think about structural, historical injustices along with her own role as scientist, educator, and settler within SJE implementations. Her diabetes curriculum is a product of her complex lived experiences and reflections on science, research, and harm to Indigenous communities through deficit narratives and lack of historical and colonial contextualization of the experiences of people being studied. Her experiences involved different professors, graduate school experiences, and reflective experiences occurring at different times in her educational and teaching career. She applied her developing critical consciousness to events from her past, which allowed her to look at things with greater critical awareness and apply new perspectives and understandings to her teaching.

The idea that conscientization for the participants was complex, non-linear, and not part of a structured program or a discrete, planned experience might suggest that teacher preparation or training programs cannot consistently or uniformly cultivate teacher critical consciousness, since the process each participant spoke about was unique, personal, and contextualized. This resonates with the research on how difficult it can be to transform teacher attitudes and beliefs (Baily & Katradis, 2016). However, the findings of this study indicate that learning about historical contexts, critical readings about oppressive systems, experiential learning that connects to teachers’ lived experiences, and identity-affirming education can build a strong foundation for

the further development of SJE consciousness among educators.

In addition to understanding more about the lived experiences of marginalized communities and the structural biases within academic disciplines and research practices, Lemon also spoke about becoming aware of her own complicity within such systems of power (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016; Young, 2011), especially with regards to Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i. Other participants like Russell, Juan, and Joanie also spoke about an awareness of settler identity, outsider impacts, responsibility, or complicity within systems of injustice, even if they did not refer to settler colonialism itself. The varying positionalities and relationships to Hawai‘i affect the different ways in which educators define and conceptualize SJE, as I will discuss in more detail below.

Significance of Definitions and Conceptualizations of SJE in Hawai‘i

In defining and conceptualizing SJE, most participants spoke about equity as a core concern. They also spoke about the importance of empowerment, for students, educators, and communities, as a goal of SJE. Participants described empowerment through skills and knowledge and civic engagement within democratic processes, and how these forms of empowerment served to enrich and sustain communities. Participants also spoke about SJE being responsive in nature, especially to student identities and place. They identified a range of ways in which they engaged with SJE in Hawai‘i, from a general responsiveness to place, being aware of outsider status, grappling with settler colonialism, and engaging with specific justice issues of ‘āina, sovereignty, and militarization in Hawai‘i. Participants often talked systemic and structural injustices that stemmed from complex histories, and which perpetuated certain narratives that continued to be oppressive. In recognizing and thinking about such structures, educators made

connections more expansively, reaching beyond existing boundaries like disciplinary silos, to implement SJE. This tendency of SJE teachers to reach beyond resonate with essential SJE dispositions like “restless curiosity” and “radical openness,” (Bondy et al., 2017) and descriptions of teachers implementing SJE in “multidimensional” ways that span personal, sociological, social, and contextual domains to acknowledge systemic issues (Menna et al., 2022).

Broad Umbrella Definition of SJE

Many participants defined and conceptualized SJE in specific ways that fit under broad SJE definitions like those articulated by Nieto and Bode (2018) or Adams (2023). The specifics of participants’ definitions and conceptualizations also suggest much resonance with underlying theories of justice like that of Fraser (Dahl et al., 2004; Fraser, 1995, 2010), and teacher dispositions and attitudes matching many elements of the Justice as Praxis framework (Bondy et al., 2017). The focus on empowerment through skills, knowledge, and civic engagement, the idea that SJE addresses oppressive systems, structures, and histories, and the connection with action and advocacy all resonate with Bell’s (2023) definition wherein SJE nurtures critical awareness of “structural features of oppression ... helps participants develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society” while connecting analysis to action (2023, p. 4).

For example, Juan planned to apply the pedagogical approach he learned at a Hawaiian focused charter school to Filipino students. He conceptualized this approach as a form of SJE, with its focus on equitable representation in curriculum, affirming and grounding students in identity, providing students opportunities for experiential, hands-on learning, and empowering them to transform their communities through strong and positive relationships with identity,

place, and community. Going beyond a broad philosophical notion of “treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (Nieto & Bode, 2018), Juan is specifically working to provide his students opportunities to “achieve to her or his potential and full participation in a democratic society,” which is connected to whether they have “access to the goods, services and cultural capital of a society” where each person’s “culture and talents” are affirmed (Nieto & Bode, 2018, p. 8).

Many of the other participants do something similar in their conceptualizations of their SJE teaching, where equity is the broad, underlying basis of a more complex awareness around histories and systems that created persistent inequities. Equitable access to a healthful living environment and positive relationships to place were essential concerns for teachers like Ulu, Mei, Ahuli‘i, and Lemon. Their implementations of SJE were not only about providing or striving for healthy communities and places now and in the future, but also aimed to nurture critical awareness, empowerment, and action among students by posing questions about why things are the way they are now.

Empowerment for a Purpose

The idea of SJE serving the purpose of empowerment towards action and advocacy, for the sake of making communities better, resonates deeply with the Hawaiian idea that knowledge for its own sake is useless, that “knowledge that holds function at its center moves our students into action and a better understanding of the roles of history and intention” (Meyer, 2016, p. 57). Again, many participants of this study emphasized empowerment through skills, knowledge, and civic engagement as an important component of SJE. This emphasis resonates with the definition in Bell (2023), where SJE develops “critical analytical tools” that deepen understanding around

oppressive structures, connecting “analysis to action” for the betterment of “lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society” (p. 2).

The recognition of systems and histories that perpetuate injustice is an essential component of empowerment for SJE. As Mei pointed out, SJE does not always address the harms and oppressions of colonization if the approach is lacking historical or systems understandings. All those elements have to be there to do SJE well. This resonates with some of the concerns brought up by scholars who say that a clear, specific, and consistent definition of SJE that addresses oppressive systems and structures is necessary for SJE to have profound or meaningful impact (Banks, 1989; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009).

Responsiveness to Hawai‘i as a Place

Cochran-Smith (2010) pointed out that the term “social justice” has been used for any aspect of teacher education that touches on equity issues or multicultural education. In this study, participants often articulated more localized, situated, or specific issues as a focus in their work in SJE, but generally spoke about these issues as fitting under broad definitions of social justice (Bell, 2023; Nieto & Bode, 2018). However, one participant spoke about educational efforts at a Hawaiian-focused charter school as striving for something other than SJE goals. Instead of seeking equity, inclusion, recognition, or access to power and resources within an existing American system, Arita said that the approach at her school is to focus on Hawaiian identity, self-determination, cultural and political survivance, and overall well-being for Native Hawaiian students in a separate but equally valid system. Arita spoke about her work as more aligned with decolonizing or anti-colonial education, but not necessarily fitting the definition of SJE. What Arita described are culturally responsive, culturally sustaining educational efforts towards

pedagogical sovereignty (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013) through aloha 'āina (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Maunakea, 2021; Oliveira, 2019). Arita's conceptualization of SJE also spoke to concerns brought up by scholars with regard to SJE and its relationship to decolonization, where "Indigenous perspectives on education have never been limited to the liberal values of increasing equity and citizenship in the nation-state" (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 10), and where the liberalism of color-blindness or equal treatment of all despite different contexts (Balutski & Wright, 2016) fails to address the settler colonial inequities for Kānaka 'Ōiwi communities. I see Arita as one of the educators who, beyond thinking about decolonization in philosophical or theoretical ways, are "pragmatically enact[ing] decolonizing work" (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 10).

The concept of mo'okū'auhau, one's connections to people, places, and spaces, is an important theme in 'ŌiwiCrit, and the basis for understanding how and why individuals have varying paths and relationships in different contexts (Balutski & Wright, 2016). In other words, each person has a specific social location in relation to actual geographical places, people, land, and collective well-being, and these assemblages of social locations inform a set of roles and responsibilities, which include knowing when and how to enact them (Kaomea, 2009a; Patel, 2016; Warner, 1999). Along these lines, participants spoke in diverse ways about how their perceptions of their relationships with Hawai'i inform their definitions and implementations of SJE.

For example, Russell talked about being aware of "when to show up and how much to show up," which resonated with Ka'omea's recommendations for non-Indigenous participants to carefully consider one's place, role, responsibilities, and how much to step forward, if at all, in Hawaiian learning contexts (Kaomea, 2009a). In addition, Russell made the choice to perpetuate

Hawaiian ways of knowing and being through his high school Spanish class, because he wanted his impact as an outsider in Hawai‘i to be more positive rather than extractive or erasing of Hawai‘i. As a self-identified outsider, Russell is one example of an educator in a settler colonial context reaching towards what Smith (Tuck et al., 2018) says an Indigenous researcher needs to know: how to position oneself, negotiate complexity, and work with community, land, and water to do “good work” (p. 13).

Of course, the description above also applies to other participants with different relationships to Hawai‘i. Mei described her conscientization process as an “awakening” that helped her see power structures at work, and which led to personal, familial, and community healing. During this process, she embarked on deeper learning to heal her own relationships to place, which I saw as an act of resistance against the ways in which colonialism has “altered Kānaka ‘Ōiwi relationships with ... ‘aina” (Balutski & Wright, 2016, p. 91). As part of her growing awareness, Mei also spoke about how everything is connected and how SJE must make connections across existing disciplinary boundaries. Similarly, Lemon also spoke about how Indigenous science is a study of everything. These ideas illustrated the potential of Indigenous epistemologies in deconstructing Western disciplinary structures, philosophies, and practices, and establishing Indigenous frameworks for knowing and being (Balutski & Wright, 2016; Tuck et al., 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012, 2018).

While Ahuli‘i spoke broadly about democracy, identity, representation, and critical thinking, she also framed her SJE consciousness with the statement “I am Hawaiian first.” This statement seems like a good one to anchor one end of a spectrum in degrees of responsiveness to Hawai‘i in defining SJE. Participants like Ahuli‘i, Ulu, Punana, and Mei spoke specifically about

responding to past and ongoing injustices facing Hawai‘i due to its colonial history, military occupation, and ongoing settler colonialism. Their responses included familiarity and specificity about the ways in which colonialism and militarization has “altered Kānaka ‘Ōiwi relationships with our ‘āina, our economies, our governance, our ways of learning and teaching, our relationships with each other, and even ourselves” (Balutski & Wright, 2016, p. 91). I often sensed among this subset of participants a deep emotional, intellectual, and visceral connection to these ongoing injustices in specific places with specific histories. Even though none of them used the word “kuleana,” their focus on taking care of and improving relationships to these places are a way of enacting their kuleana (right, responsibility, privilege, concern, authority) (Balutski & Wright, 2016, p. 94) but through different pathways, based on different social locations, relationships, and contexts.

Other participants like Joanie, Juan, Lemon, and Russell spoke about the complexities of settler awareness informing their roles or actions in implementing SJE. Participants like Pedro, Steve, Quang, and Juan focused on equity and empowerment for specific settler communities in Hawai‘i who have also been marginalized by colonialism, imperialism, military occupation, stereotypes, or deficit narratives. Other educators implemented broader definitions of SJE in Hawai‘i, which sometimes included serving an underresourced local community with love and compassion (Naoko); teaching about Hawai‘i’s uniqueness as a place (Jen); allowing other, more qualified educators to take the lead on place-based education (Matt); implementing project-based, interdisciplinary education towards sustainability (Alex); or grappling with Hawai‘i’s cultural contexts while implementing democratic, inquiry-based education (Valerie). I do not suggest that there is more or less value on any part of this spectrum of responsiveness to Hawai‘i, but that

definitions and implementations of SJE vary based on participant positionalities, perspectives, and experiences. This project was never about comparing or evaluating SJE approaches among participants. Throughout the process of thinking and talking about diverse participant experiences, one invariable constant for me was being able to see and feel the profound care, dedication, and pride each participant had for their students, communities, and place while holding the complexities and challenges of SJE in their hearts and minds.

Implications for SJE Practice

The findings of this study speak to at least two broad areas in education: considerations for how to define and implement SJE in Hawai‘i, and what this means for developing justice-minded teachers for Hawai‘i. My own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives as a settler and transplant teacher in Hawai‘i, the experience of having conducted this study, and ongoing reflections on the findings all undoubtedly shape how I think about and present these implications. In line with the order of the two research questions for this study, I begin by presenting what I think it means to be a social justice educator in Hawai‘i. This leads to an exploration of how the findings inform SJE definitions and conceptualizations in Hawai‘i. Finally, I provide some practical examples for SJE implementation and address possible teacher concerns.

What Does it Mean to be an SJE Educator in Hawai‘i?

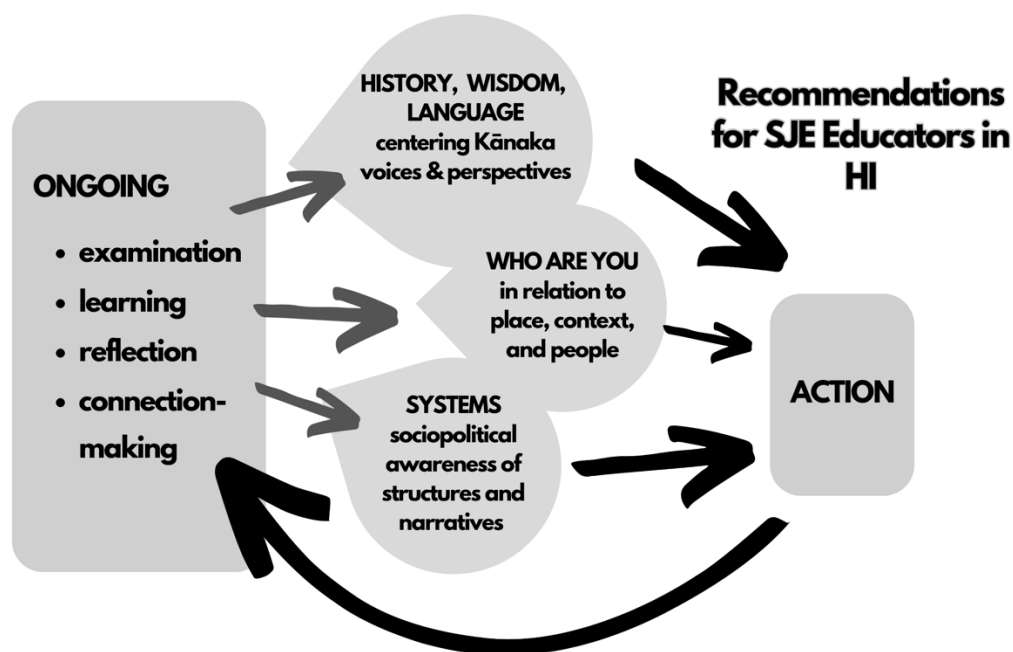
In reflecting upon and synthesizing the findings of this study and my lived experiences in education, I propose that educators defining and implementing SJE in Hawai‘i proactively engage in ongoing examination, learning, reflection, and connection-making in these three areas:

1. Hawaiian history, ways of knowing and being, and language, by listening to, learning from, and centering Kānaka voices and perspectives;
2. Who they are in relation to place, contexts, and communities, with an awareness of specific historical and ongoing settler impacts in Hawai‘i;
3. Ongoing systems, structures, and narratives that relate to persistent injustices in education.

Since identity is situated and relational, educators should explore their roles and impacts in honest, non-defensive ways, looking at relationships to place, history, contexts, and communities. This includes being aware of and actively seeking to shed light on settler blind spots, and deeply listening to Hawaiian thinkers and educators rather than implementing preconceived notions of what education or justice “should” look like. Settler colonialism, as an ongoing structure rather than a past historical event (Wolfe, 2006), might have us believe that current structures are natural or inevitable. Yet, there is always the option to choose not to align with the settler state, to reach beyond colonizer narratives of inevitability, and to imagine a future outside of what the settler state might have you believe is possible. Such learning serves as a foundation for action, which includes ongoing education of self and others, contextualizing definitions, conceptualizations, and implementations of SJE, and more broadly, to dismantle oppressive structures. Figure 3 summarizes these recommendations.

Figure 3.

Recommendations for SJE Educators in Hawai‘i



What is SJE in Hawai‘i?

The above recommendations for SJE educators in Hawai‘i serve as a foundation for defining SJE in Hawai‘i, which is at once broader and more specific than the definitions in the literature. The concern with equity, empowerment, awareness of oppressive systems, and the focus on action are all themes in the findings that resonate with existing definitions of SJE (Nieto & Bode, 2018; Bell, 2023). However, the framework of settler colonialism provides a reminder that what SJE means here in Hawai‘i can not be the same as what SJE means in other places and contexts. In other words, SJE for Hawai‘i, or any place, must be situated in specific histories and contexts of place, relationships, culture, and knowledge. In particular, as we have seen from settler colonialism, broad ideas of equality and civil rights from U.S. contexts can actually obscure and undermine the specific rights of Native Hawaiians (Fujikane, 2008; Goodyear-

Ka'ōpua, 2013). At the same time, it is also important to remember that justice-oriented efforts responding to settler colonialism may require even broader conceptions beyond the idea of “justice.” As Tuck and Yang pointed out, “Indigenous resurgence is about forms of life that do not take oppression as their defining referent,” and as such, both “precede and exceed” ideas of justice. In other words, material concerns like sovereignty, self-determination, or decolonization cannot be contained within general or abstract ideas of justice, which are limited by its framing within “colonial time” and the nation-state (Tuck & Yang, 2016, p. 9).

The findings in this study suggest that SJE in Hawai'i should be identity-affirming, with identity defined as situated and relational. In other words, SJE must recognize the value of affirming complex identities, and conversely, that ignoring, erasing, or devaluing identities cause harm. The multiple identities of teachers and students include the list of social identity markers that often appears in SJE literature: race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, culture, ability, etc. (Pugach et al., 2019), often without acknowledgement or discussion of intersectionality. The findings of this study suggest that SJE should consider identity in more complex and situated ways, not only in terms of intersectionality, but rather in terms of “connections to people, places, and spaces” which vary by specific relationships and contexts (Balutski & Wright, 2016). The difference in how Ahuli'i and Juan spoke about their own identities, for example, highlighted how important it is that people know who they are.

Telling the truth about oppressive systems is important in any educational context, and important in Hawai'i precisely because settler colonial structures continue to obscure certain oppressions. It is important that educators recognize, understand, and tell the truth about oppressive systems, structures, and histories to their students, particularly around the specific

contexts of the places and communities in which teachers serve. As an elementary school educator, I have noticed that not all educators feel comfortable talking about oppressive systems and histories. Teachers' life experiences and academic experiences vary greatly, which also means that their "complex systems understanding of SJE" and their implementations of SJE vary significantly (Baily & Katradis, 2016; Belknap, 2020; Freire, 2021; Kelly-Jackson, 2015; Menna et al., 2022; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). It is also possible that teachers subscribe to deficit narratives of the communities they serve (Kaomea, 2005; Yosso, 2005), or that they share the type of individualistic notions that Mei held before her "cultural awakening," where individuals were responsible for their actions, consequences, and circumstances. Seeing the "bigger picture" of oppressive systems at work is fundamental to the critical sociological dimension of the Justice as Praxis framework, where educators see injustice as embedded in systems rather than due to individual choices (Bondy et al., 2017). Furthermore, teachers can demonstrate solidarity with the communities they serve through immersive learning and responsiveness to the specific assets and inequities in a particular place (Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016; Liu & Ball, 2019).

Thus, defining SJE in Hawai'i must prioritize an understanding of accurate histories; settler impacts; relationships to place, community, and 'aina; and actively perpetuate Hawaiian ways of knowing and being, along with material well-being and survivance for Native Hawaiians. In addition, being a non-Kānaka social justice educator in Hawai'i requires non-defensive, ongoing reflection and examination of one's positionality, social locations, impacts, and complicity here as settlers, transplants, or outsiders. These learnings must then lead to action according to varying responsibilities and relationships to place, community, and land.

What Does SJE in Hawai‘i Look Like?

Drawing on the wisdom and experiences of study participants, I provide a brief, non-definitive list of things for educators to include in their definitions and implementations of SJE in Hawai‘i:

1. Center Hawai‘i, regardless of the discipline or subject matter, regardless of whether you think of yourself as doing SJE, by including truthful history, perpetuating Hawaiian ways of knowing and being (including, for example, the use of ‘olelo Hawai‘i), and centering Hawaiian voices and perspectives.
2. Guide and support student identity development in complex, dynamic ways that are grounded in place, contexts, and relationships, with an awareness of social locations, impacts, and responsibilities. Like SJE educators, students can also examine their relationships to place and be thoughtful about how and when to take action.
3. Contextualize “action” within Hawaiian epistemologies, which might include the idea that listening is a form of action, or that one is thoughtful about how and when to speak up and show up.
4. Plant the seeds for critical consciousness by building awareness of systems and structures of power.

Addressing Educator Concerns Around SJE for Young Children

Many participants in this study spoke about their own experiences as empowered learners in student-centered, inquiry-based, experiential learning around social justice. Many educators also spoke about designing and implementing learning experiences for the purpose of empowering students towards justice-oriented action. However, I repeatedly encounter teacher

assertions that hard histories are unnecessary burdens or too heavy, especially for younger students.

My belief about this, as supported by the conversations I had during this project, is that education involving sad and complex structures like prejudice, enslavement, or colonialism can and should actually begin earlier rather than later, because complex learning takes more time over the course of a learner's development. However, as with all learning, it can and should occur in thoughtfully scaffolded, child-centered, developmentally appropriate ways that educate and empower through knowledge and action. For example, beginning with child-friendly concepts like fairness, empathy, safety, bodily autonomy, or inclusion, which are important and familiar to young children, social justice educators can then connect the learning to child-friendly forms of action around specific issues.

My recommendation is that educators think of SJE as a complex, dynamic process that involves planting seeds for critical consciousness throughout a learner's academic career. Being silent or evasive about systemic oppressions allows children to witness or experience the effects of inequities that already exist in the world, without a way to contextualize them. This causes harm, as we saw from the accounts of grief and loss around disidentification, cultural devaluation, and curricular gaps. Conversely, educating children about difficult realities along with the developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills for taking action can give them a greater sense of empowerment.

We have also seen from participants' accounts how children may experience a form of injustice and not fully understand it until they develop greater critical consciousness later. If educators situate ideas of justice within place and relationships, affirm student identities in

complex ways, and plant the seeds for justice-oriented, systems-conscious thinking at an early age, we might be able to avoid practicing the type of “curricular neglect” that Punana described. As we also saw in the findings of this study, when people experience identity affirming SJE, they can in turn empower others in ways that have far-reaching positive impacts for future students and communities.

Limitations of This Study

One shortcoming of this research is the lack of observation data in the field. I began the project with the aspiration of focusing on fewer participants while getting more in-depth, contextual data including surveys, interviews, classroom observation data, and sample curricula. In particular, observing participants in their professional contexts would have allowed for the gathering of richer descriptive data. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person research requests were not being considered at many institutions when I was collecting data. Since I am also a full-time teacher, it would have been challenging for me to take leave from my job to observe other teachers in their schools and classrooms. Staying within the scope and time frame for this project, where data collection occurred mostly in the spring and summer of 2022, I expanded the number of participants with the intention of collecting fewer types of sources, namely, surveys and interview data.

I engaged in purposive sampling of participants, targeting specific people from within my existing networks, or whom professors had suggested to me. In this sense, the participant pool was partly shaped by factors of relationships and mutual convenience. During the recruitment process I realized that only 4 out of 17 participants were people who did not have a direct connection to me through academic or professional networks. The 4 participants whom I had

never spoken to before this project had all received an introduction to me, or were recommended to me, by a mutual contact within my academic or professional networks. This suggested that people who knew me in an academic or professional context, or who knew one of my contacts, were more likely to take the time to respond or agree to be interviewed. Reflecting on this process, I wondered how true this was for other qualitative researchers in Hawai‘i, that friends, classmates, colleagues, and other acquaintances played an important part in the participant recruitment, and if this was detrimental to the project in terms of limiting the potential range of perspectives and voices represented. A related shortcoming is that I may have ended up with many participants who shared some of my experiences as an educator and graduate student, where we may share a familiarity with theories, coursework, interests, or language used to discuss social justice education. The possibility of being in an intellectual echo chamber while conducting this research may have limited the range of ideas and perspectives I explored.

I believe this study would also have been enriched by including educators from Hawaiian language immersion schools, as it would have provided more nuanced perspectives on possible gaps or alliances between SJE as broadly defined in the literature and, in my perception, one type of educational effort responding to settler colonial structures (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013; Kahakalau, 2003). In other words, I wanted to explore educators’ perspectives on if and how Hawaiian language revitalization or immersion resonated with broader definitions of SJE. I made many efforts to recruit participants who worked in this area, by asking people through my networks to connect me with potential participants, and by sending unsolicited emails to language immersion schools and programs. Ultimately I was unable to recruit participants who worked in Hawaiian language immersion.

While there may have been many reasons for this, I explore two possibilities here. First, I designed my study to recruit educators who self-identified as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in their teaching. It is possible that educators in Hawaiian language revitalization or immersion efforts do not self identify in these ways. This is not surprising given the scholarship on Asian settler colonialism (Fujikane, 2008) and the idea that social justice is a colonial era concept (Tuck & Yang, 2012, 2016, 2018). As stated earlier, Indigenous resurgence efforts “precede and exceed injustice and, by the same token, justice” and have “specific material concerns that refuse the abstraction of justice and its limits in the nation-state” (Tuck & Yang, 2016, p. 9). In other words, perhaps language immersion/language revitalization educators share Arita’s belief that what they do does not fall under the broad umbrella of SJE. This was not something I fully considered when recruiting participants.

Second, as an outsider researcher, settler, and transplant teacher, it is understandable that I did not have the trust of educators working in the area of Hawaiian language immersion and revitalization. I understand educators not wanting to be the object of study in a way that might perpetuate colonial research practices (Smith, 2021), especially since my study was not set up to be reciprocal with Hawaiian communities. I can also understand the belief that a study of Hawaiian language revitalization efforts should be designed, led, and conducted by someone who belongs to the community, or someone who has earned trust and built relationships within the community.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many ways to build on this study to continue addressing the research gaps around SJE in practice. One recommendation for future research is to explore more fully the

specific implementations and challenges of SJE in practice, which has implications for supporting novice and veteran teachers as they implement SJE. As suggested above, further study could include a broader range of data sources such as site visit data and classroom observation data in relation to specific implementations of SJE. It may also be helpful to gather information about student thinking and learning in response to SJE, which would also address the research gap around the effectiveness of SJE (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021).

The existing research tended to focus on the experiences of preservice or novice teachers for SJE (Pugach et al., 2019; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021) while sometimes speculating on how experienced teachers might experience SJE (Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). In my experience, SJE is also relevant and necessary for veteran teachers, some of whom may be unfamiliar with the concepts, terminology, or pedagogies of SJE if these were not part of their teacher training or ongoing development experiences. Therefore, a possible direction for research on SJE is to do a longitudinal study on teachers' experiences or perceptions around SJE over a longer span of time as teachers gain experience.

It may also be helpful to do a more inclusive study with looser criteria to collect information on what educators believe to be SJE and what SJE means to them, even if they do not self-identify as having an SJE orientation. On the other hand, returning to the question of specific educational injustices in Hawai'i due to settler colonialism, a more in-depth study can focus on participants like Punana, Arita, Ulu, Mei, or Ahuli'i, who explicitly addressed issues related to Hawai'i's colonization, occupation, and ongoing settler colonialism in their conceptions of SJE. Research on SJE within specific schools or communities, for example, in partnership with Hawaiian-focused charter schools or language immersion programs, would also

be important additions to the conversation on what SJE means in Hawai‘i. However, the research questions that interest me as an settler and outsider, and indeed, the bigger question of what is at stake in such a study, are likely very different from the questions, concerns, and priorities important to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi scholars and communities. Such research must center the leadership, scholarship, and well-being of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi communities (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2016; Smith, 2021) rather than be driven by settler interests.

Conclusion

This study found that K-12 social justice educators in Hawai‘i spoke about situated, relational identities as important factors that shaped their orientation towards SJE. Many experienced erasure or devaluation of identities in some way, which honed their thinking around justice and education. Participants gained critical consciousness about social justice in complex and varied ways, sometimes from seeking out experiences, and sometimes in non-linear ways that may have taken place over different time periods in their lives. The development of awareness around structural, systemic, or historical inequities played a prominent role in participants’s experiences. These experiences led them to define SJE with a primary concern for equity, attained through the empowerment of students via knowledge, skills, and civic engagement. Empowerment was also an important aspect of SJE teacher experience, connecting their identities and lived experiences. There was a range of responsiveness to Hawai‘i, from “I am Hawaiian first,” to settler awareness and dilemmas, to broader implementations of SJE aligning in many ways with the scholarly literature on SJE. Of the participants, some spoke specifically about SJE including specific issues relating to of Native Hawaiian self-determination and survivance, though one participant explained why her conceptualization did not include

these decolonizing concerns under the SJE umbrella. In addition to responsiveness to place, histories, and cultures, SJE also included awareness of systems, structures, and histories of injustice, along with the ability to make connections across boundaries. Participant definitions, experiences, and dispositions aligned with many aspects of existing SJE literature, highlighting also areas where gaps still offer opportunities for further research.

Tuck and Yang argue that all education should be social justice education, that SJE should no longer be “other” or alternative to mainstream education, and that there is no “legitimacy to the field of education if it cannot meaningfully attend to social contexts, historical and contemporary structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and antiblackness” (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 5). Regardless of varying relationships to Hawai‘i, SJE in Hawai‘i must focus on relationality and responsibilities that “require/urge/direct/instruct us to be good ancestors to future generations of human and non-human entities” (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 23). After all,

It comes down to how you position yourself, how you understand yourself, your intentions and capacity to do work in good way, your skills at negotiating complexity and your ability to work in relation with community, with land and water, with a wider sense of the world. (Tuck et al., 2018, p. 13)

Critical awareness of Hawai‘i’s specific colonial history and the ongoing inequities of occupation and settler colonialism; reflexive thinking on educator positionalities, impacts, and responsibilities in the context of relationships and place; and drawing on Hawaiian epistemologies for education, can all serve as a valuable foundation for developing definitions and implementations of K-12 SJE in Hawai‘i. Furthermore, experiences that affirm identities, that honor relationships and place, and the acknowledgement of systems, structures, and histories

that perpetuate inequities can inform practices that support teacher development towards greater social justice consciousness.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Aloha. My name is Jingwoan Chang and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Education, in the Department of Curriculum Studies. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am doing a research study on K-12 teachers in Hawai'i who self-identify as having a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in their work as educators.

What am I being asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this research study, I will ask you to complete this survey. I will also invite you to share artifacts related to your teaching. Based on the responses in the survey, I will select a smaller group of participants to interview and observe (if possible).

Taking part in this study is your choice.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of my project is to examine how K-12 educators in Hawai'i define and implement social justice education, how their relationships to Hawai'i inform their ideas of social justice education, and possible alignments or gaps between social justice education and responses to settler colonialism. I am asking you to participate because you either self-identified, or were recommended by an academic or professional contact, as a K-12 educator in Hawai'i with a social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial orientation in your work as educator.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

If you give your consent to participate in this study, I will ask you to complete the attached survey, which consists of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. I will also invite you to share any artifacts (e.g. syllabi, documents, online materials) that relate to your work as an educator. Completing the survey will take about 10-20 minutes. Using the survey data, I will select a few participants for site visits, observations, and interviews (two individual interviews

via Zoom and one focus group interview with other participants). If selected for the interviews, I will also schedule a site visit or observation to provide richer context for the data you share. Finally, I will invite you to respond to the sections of my dissertation that draw on the data you provided.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the survey or interview questions, or during my site visit or observation. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the survey, interview, site visit, observation, or withdraw from the project altogether.

The results of this project may contribute to academic research on social justice teaching and teacher training in Hawai‘i by describing how teachers in Hawai‘i define and implement social justice teaching, and by identifying possible gaps or alliances between social justice education and responses to settler colonialism by educators in Hawai‘i.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

I will keep all study data secure in a password-protected Google account, on a password-protected computer. Only my University of Hawai‘i advisor Dr. E. Brook Chapman de Sousa and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai‘i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study.

When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. As much as possible, I will avoid sharing information that may identify you by inference. I may use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Future Research Studies:

Identifiers will be removed from your identifiable private information, and after removal of identifiers, the data may be used for future research studies by this researcher in an area related to social justice teaching in Hawai'i.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at 773-242-0970 or jingwoan.chang@gmail.com. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. E. Brook Chapman de Sousa at 808-489-0230 or eb Sousa@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808-956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to participate in this project, please click "Next" to access the survey. Going to the first page of the survey implies your consent to participate in this research study. Please print or save a copy of this page for your reference. Mahalo!

* Required

Section 1 of 5: Name and Contact Information

1. Name *
2. Email address *
3. Phone number *
4. How would you describe your gender?
5. Preferred pronouns

Section 2 of 5: Background Information

6. Select one or more of the following categories to describe yourself. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Native Hawaiian
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ Caucasian or White
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Asian Indian
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Laotian
- ☐ Thai
- ☐ Vietnamese
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Latina/o
- ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro
- ☐ Micronesian
- ☐ Samoan
- ☐ Tongan

Other:

Section 3 of 5: Professional Background

7. Where do you currently teach? *

8. Describe your current school (select all that apply): *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ elementary
- ☐ middle
- ☐ high school
- ☐ public
- ☐ charter
- ☐ private/independent
- ☐ religious

Other:

9. What is your teaching area, subject, or position at your current school? *

10. What grades do you teach? *

11. How many years have you been teaching in Hawai'i? *

12. How many years have you been teaching overall? *

13. Which of these apply to you? (Please select all that apply.) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ I received all or part of my K-12 education in Hawai'i.
- ☐ I received all or part of my K-12 education outside of Hawai'i.
- ☐ I attended university or graduate school in Hawai'i.
- ☐ I attended university or graduate school outside of Hawai'i.
- ☐ I completed a teacher preparation program in Hawai'i.

- I completed a teacher preparation program outside of Hawai‘i.
- I have taught in other U.S. states or other countries.
- I moved to Hawai‘i to teach.

14. If it is possible for me to visit your school and observe you in the context of your educational work, who should I contact for permission? (Name, position, email, phone number) *

15. Is there anything you'd like to add about your professional background that might relate to your social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial education?

Section 4 of 5: Relationship to Hawai‘i and Social Justice Teaching

16. How would you describe your relationship to Hawai‘i, in terms of lineage, ancestry, identity, upbringing, language, or relationships? *

17. Do you identify as an educator with an orientation towards ... (select all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- social justice education
- decolonizing education
- anti-colonial education

Other:

18. How do you define social justice education? *

19. What are some examples of how you have implemented social justice education? *

20. How does your relationship to Hawai‘i inform your definition or implementation of social justice education? *

21. To contextualize your responses, it would be very helpful for me to see artifacts of your teaching that relate to social justice education, decolonizing education, or anti-colonial education.

This could include course syllabi, assignments, documents, publications, samples of student work, etc. If you have any to share, please email them to jchang99@hawaii.edu. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ I will email some artifacts to jchang99@hawaii.edu
- ☐ I do not have any artifacts to share.

22. Is there anything else you would like to add about your relationship to Hawai'i or your social justice, decolonizing, or anti-colonial teaching?

Thank you so much for taking this survey!