2014

Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

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ENGAGING IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH TODDLERS

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PIM 72

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Service, Leadership and Management

At SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

December 14, 2015

Advisor: Karen Blanchard
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Susan Nasiombe
December 14, 2015
This capstone is dedicated to my Grammy who showed me that women can do anything.
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Abstract

This study was created as a way to highlight and begin filling a large void in academic information regarding the ways caregivers engage in social justice with the toddlers they care for. Through an online survey, participants were asked to explain their role and experience as caregivers, give their definition of social justice, share the social justice resources they use to help inform their engagement with toddlers, and list the limitations and barriers they face in achieving their goals in this area. Participants were also asked to assess their value of various elements commonly used to engage toddlers in social justice. These elements were separated into five categories; social justice in the learning environment, social justice in the community, directly teaching social justice, relating with social justice, and modeling social justice.

My research suggests that caregivers know more than they realize and with a bit of support they will feel confidant exploring social justice issues with their toddlers. This study will encourage more social justice researchers to focus on toddlers to help fill the lack of academic and empirical work focused on this important, impressionable age group.
Definitions

Both the early childhood and social justice fields tend to have a variety of definitions for any given term, allowing for situational applicability and flexibility during this current rapid growth period occurring in both fields. For the sake of clarity in this particular study the following definitions will apply unless otherwise noted.

Caregivers: Parents, nannies, childcare providers, educators, teachers.

Toddlers: Children ages one, two and three years old.

Social Justice: The practice of ensuring that all people in society are treated equitably with the protection of human rights and provision of resources, regardless of status, privilege or power.

Social Justice Issue: A specific topic or commonly reoccurring situation where social justice is being compromised

Engagement Strategy: A method of drawing toddlers into the experience via exploration and/or conceptualization of themes relating to social justice.
Introduction

Social justice work must begin with our youngest citizens; both because they are just learning to form their understanding of how the world does and should work and because they are vulnerable, and often underprivileged and mistreated. Knowing that young children learn through relationships and engaging with their environment and community, in addition to direct teaching (NAEYC, 2009), it is easy to conclude that the primary caregivers of young children provide a crucial link in building a foundational understanding of what social justice is and how it should play out in daily life.

A child may have multiple adults in their life who act as a primary caregiver. Primary caregivers typically include the child’s parents as well as a teacher, nanny, babysitter, or care provider. These are the people who have the responsibility to keep the child healthy, safe, and give them their first lessons on life. Primary care relationships are powerful, especially to very young children who show higher levels of independence, persistence and resilience when they experience consistency and trust in their caregiving relationships (MY EEC, 2015).

Caregivers, then, are in a key position to engage young children in the concepts and issues of social justice. Engaging anyone in social justice is challenging work to say the least, so is caring for young children. Toddlers in particular are known for defiant behavior, testing limits, asking “why”, and asserting their personal agency. It seems that the whole focus of the toddler is to determine who has power, for what reason, and in which scenarios. It is because of the heightened awareness that toddlers possess during this developmental period, that caregivers should take time to meaningfully engage with them around the issues of social justice. Caregivers must do this by example: by treating
the toddler justly, by exploring social justice topics that are present in the child’s environment and community, and by explicitly teaching toddlers social justice concepts. However, it is easy for caregivers to lose sight of even their best intentions when they are faced with the endless challenges of diaper changes, mood swings, meal times, and cleaning up the never-ending piles of messes toddlers naturally produce.

Knowing this, I began to search specifically for existing resources that support caregivers of toddlers in exploring social justice. I searched for books, curriculum, activities, toys, events, speakers, theories and websites. What I discovered is that while there have been some truly wonderful strides in developing these resources for older children almost nothing exists for toddlers. Next I searched the research, hoping to uncover some studies or theories that had not yet made their way into the general public. I gathered a meager handful of semi-relevant work. Looking at a very small pile of inconsequential resources and unhelpful research I thought about all of the caregivers that I personally know who do make a noticeable effort to engage their toddlers in social justice. I knew that people were doing the work and I wanted to find out more.

My capstone research is focused on the broad question of “What does it mean to engage in social justice with toddlers?” This big question can be further broken down into the following four sub-questions:

- What do caregivers know about social justice and how are they relating this knowledge to their toddlers?

- What are caregiver attitudes and values regarding engaging in social justice with toddlers?

- What barriers and limitations do caregivers face regarding engaging in social justice with toddlers?

- What resources do caregivers have in this area and what resources do they need?
Literature Review

There is very little research relating directly to both toddlers and the wider concept of social justice. The majority of relevant literature focuses on the basic human rights of toddlers (Lally, 2005) with the purpose of ending toddler abuse and neglect (UNICEF, 2014). Almost none of the research focuses on appropriate and effective ways to teach toddlers social justice concepts or how to create learning environments and relationships that invite toddlers to explore social justice issues.

Interestingly, there has been a fair amount of research surrounding the ways young children interact with specific social justice issues, especially gender, race, and language. While these studies have been successful in creating theories about how young children develop their beliefs and identities in these specific areas, the studies have been focused on children who are three to five years old and have not been able to connect their findings to a wider social justice application (Connolly, 2002; Martin & Rubie, 2004). There are a handful of studies that go one step further and focus on the young child’s ability to communicate various biases, though they tend to focus on language development and not on the development of the biases themselves (Diesendruck & Deblinger-Tangi, 2014).

As the wider pedagogical field has continued to refine theories surrounding endemic injustice, structural privilege, and the role of education, the term “Equity Pedagogy” has taken root as a way to refer to the many types of pedagogical models dealing in such subject matter (Hyland, 2010). Many professionals in the early education field are familiar with “multicultural education” (Ramsey, 2004), “anti-bias education” (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010) or a “rights based approach” (Ghirotto &
Mazzoni, 2013) in addition to more specific curriculum surrounding conflict resolution, anti-bullying, and supporting pro-social behaviors. While these models vary in focus and implementation, they all share the common assumption “that if teachers and schools do not consciously attempt to counter injustice, then by default, they support it” (Hyland, 2010).

While all of these approaches have been helpful in introducing equity pedagogy to early education environments, most of them focus on direct instruction, activities, or a classroom-learning environment. Very few touch on the deeply influential and ever present power dynamic that exists between adult and child. Ignoring this power differential drastically limits the approach’s benefits and application because of its failure to acknowledge and support the learning that can only come through an intimate relationship with a primary caregiver. In the rare occasion that equity pedagogy does recognize the adult/child power differential, the focus is centered on using adult power to create, instead of limit, learning opportunities (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013). While this is a critical perspective, it still does not address maintaining equitable treatment and generous resource allocation during the inevitable and numerous power struggles of toddler/adult relationships.

Many studies suggest that children ages one to three years old are particularly susceptible to adult modeling (Gerull & Rapee, 2002; Rakoczy, Tomasello & Striano, 2005), especially when it comes to learning social categories and societal patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Diesendruck & Deblinger-Tangi, 2014). Yet despite this, “there are few large-scale empirical studies that evaluate the use of pedagogical strategies in classrooms that work against limiting messages [regarding race, class, gender and sexual
orientation] and almost none in early childhood classrooms” (Hyland, 2010). Perhaps the lack of research contributes to why almost all of the models of equity pedagogy are specifically designed for children four years and older.

The current literature somehow manages to simultaneously support the notion that toddlers are in a prime developmental stage for absorbing social justice concepts and skills, while at the same time omitting this age group from all academic studies or formal models of equity education. This negligence not only leaves caregivers with too few academic resources to support their own caregiving practices, but it also allows society to continue to tell a condemning story of “the terrible twos.” This story portrays toddlers as unruly, selfish, and mean creatures who intentionally manipulate the people around them with emotional theatrics. Our society is just beginning to tell the perhaps truer tale of “the tireless toddlers” who will stop at nothing to methodically test boundaries, scrutinize social systems, and demand that they receive all the power and access to resources they can handle, but not a single bit more. This new story needs empirical research and theoretical models to give breadth and depth to a narrative most caregivers already know by heart.
Research Design

In order to discover if and how caregivers are engaging in social justice with the toddlers they care for, I asked a sample group of caregivers to complete an anonymous survey. Fifty-two caregivers responded. The sample group was made up of parents and guardians who currently have toddler children, as well as adults who care for and educate toddlers professionally (this group included nannies, child care providers, educators, and teachers). The sample group did not include people who care for children casually (grandparents, friends, aunts and uncles) or those who work with toddlers professionally for a specific purpose other than general education and care (therapists, psychologists, pediatricians, bus drivers, social workers, etc). This group of caregivers was selected due to their current engagement with toddlers as well as their general role as a primary caregiver in the child’s life. While many people interact with toddlers, they may not have the same influence as a primary caregiver or they may only be interacting with the child in order to achieve a specific outcome, in both cases making their perspectives less relevant to this specific study.

The participants were initially contacted either via individual email or through a private message on Facebook. This contact came directly from me or, in three instances, employees were contacted by their supervisor. In these situations, I contacted the director of the programs and informed them about my research. I then asked them to send the survey invitation to their toddler teachers.

All participants received an invitation to participate in the survey. The invitation gave a brief explanation of the study, information regarding how the data would be used, assurance about how participant identity would be protected, and included a link to the
online survey. Participants were not coerced, bribed, rewarded, compensated or otherwise externally motivated to participate. Due to the online format of this study, initial contact via an online method was appropriate. It also allowed all potential participants to be notified within a similar time frame and with the same invitation.

The survey itself was created using a mix of short answer, multiple choice and matrix questions to allow for a freedom of response while at the same time keeping participants focused on the content of the survey. After giving their informed consent, participants were asked a variety of questions to help explain their experience as a caregiver. After that they were asked to explain their perspectives on social justice in general and how it applies to their care of toddlers. Next, a series of matrix questions assessed the perceived importance of various elements in relation to social justice. These questions were broken down into five major care-taking categories: learning environment, community, direct teaching, modeling, and relationship. Following this was a request for caregivers to identify their limitations and barriers and a few questions that dealt with participant access to resources that support their social justice work with toddlers. Finally participants were asked to give a message to children regarding social justice before answering some demographic data. Two early childhood education professionals tested the survey. Tester one has almost thirty years of experience in a wide range of early childhood settings and tester two has done extensive work engaging young children in relevant and meaningful social justice exploration.

Data was collected via an online survey, using the tool Survey Monkey. Questions were created intentionally to allow participants to answer freely and anonymously while also aiming to generate the desired data. Before beginning the survey, participants again
had the opportunity to review information about the research and how the data will be used. They were also reminded of their anonymity and freedom to skip questions, leave information blank, and/or stop taking the survey at any time. Survey Monkey was used because it is a reliable and inexpensive survey tool that most participants were likely to be familiar with. Survey Monkey also allows for total anonymity through an option that was utilized during this study to block participant computer’s IP addresses from being recorded.

The gathered data was analyzed in part through Survey Monkey, which allows data to be viewed based on numbers of certain responses as well as categorized by the participant-provided demographic information. The short answer questions were analyzed through researcher coding and searching for existing patterns.

Some of the inherent bias in this study comes through its format. A written online platform requires that participants are both literate in English and have access to reliable internet services. Another major limitation to this design is that it is reliant on participants to whom I have access. This means that I asked family, friends, and colleagues to participate in my research, which may have provided unintentional incentive for them to participate. I attempted to limit this incentive through the wording of the invitation letter and ensuring participants that I will have no way of knowing if they participate. In the same vein, participants were only asked to participate once, with no further follow up unless they had questions to ask.

Surveying people I have personal access to may have also lead to similar responses as this group of caregivers is limited and generally they have some similar qualities that might likely reflect my own personal beliefs and opinions. Similarly, the
majority of participants I had access to are white, straight women who come from educated middle class backgrounds. To a large degree, this also limits the scope of my research through the reduced representation of marginalized voices.
Findings

Fifty-two toddler caregivers took the survey, but only thirty-one answered enough questions for their survey to be considered “complete.” While the majority of invitations went to professionals, parents made up the majority of respondents. More specifically the respondents were made up of ten professionals, eighteen parents, and three people who identified as currently being both a parent and professional toddler caregiver. Most of the participants care for young toddlers in a small group with other children under age five, though not necessarily other toddlers. Because the majority of respondents were parents who reported having fewer than five years of experience with toddlers, it can be assumed that they likely had little to no experience with toddlers until they had a toddler of their own. This is not to say that they are uneducated. In fact the parent group had a wide spread of education levels ranging from High School Diplomas to Doctorates. The professionals had a much wider range of experience working with toddlers spanning between four months and thirty years. However, they had a more similar level of education, with all of them having a Bachelor’s Degree with the exception of one Associates and one Master’s Degree.

To analyze the short answer response questions, I used a coding framework in order to discover the reoccurring themes, words, and ideas present in the surveys. In order to create the codes I read each response individually and recorded the various key words and ideas. When all of the responses had been dissected, I went through the list of key words and ideas and grouped them together, assigning them a code if the response occurred more than once or was a key term or idea from the literature review. Once these codes were created, the responses were read again and the codes were applied. Once the
codes were applied to the responses, similar coded sections were grouped together under common themes and broad categories.

Content question number one\(^1\) asked participants to define social justice. Their responses fell into three broad categories: values, actions and mention of specific social justice issues. One value stood out, not only ranking top in its category, but was mentioned more than any response throughout the rest of the survey, this was the value of equality and/or equity\(^2\). The number one action mentioned was “treatment of others” which includes responses involving any type of intentionally positive treatment of other people. Also, eight different social justice issues were mentioned and listed in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Content Question 1, Participant Description of Social Justice](image)

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\(^1\) Content questions comprise only the survey questions used to gather data in direct response to the research questions, and exclude demographic questions. Therefore the content question numbers do not correlate to the survey question numbers.

\(^2\) While the terms “equality” and “equity” have different definitions, they are included in the same theme due to multiple participants using the terms interchangeably in their responses.
In content question two, participants were asked what it looks like when they engage their toddler(s) in social justice, and as expected, their responses were similar to their definition of social justice but were much more nuanced and specific. Responses still broke down into the three categories of values, actions, and issues, but this time they also included specific engagement strategies that the caregivers use with toddlers. Equality and/or equity remained a high value but this time it included responses with the term “fairness” which is a very common word used with young children to express both equity and equality. Self-esteem was a response in both questions but caregivers prioritized it much higher when discussing their children. The most common response was the action of using pro-social skills. Pro-social skills include conflict resolution, navigating ownership/use rights, and empathy, which create the foundation of social justice and are highly relevant to toddlers who are just beginning to interact with a variety of people. Respondents expanded their list of social justice issues in their responses to question two to include language, education, violence, cultural values, and non-traditional families. These figures are depicted in Figure 2, on page 15.

While responding to question two caregivers also shared information about engagement strategies they use with their toddlers. One third of participants listed “modeling desired behaviors” in their response. Having discussions with their toddlers and working to understand their toddler’s perspectives and feelings were both mentioned frequently as well. The responses listed by the participants aligned very closely to the engagement strategies listed in the survey itself. For the sake of clear comparison, the data regarding engagement strategies was not included in Figure 2, but is presented in Figure 3, on page 15.
Figure 2: Content Question 2, Participant Description of Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

Figure 3: Content Question 2, Participant Listed Engagement Strategies
This study aimed to uncover not only which engagement strategies are being used by caregivers but also to better understand the perceived importance of said strategies. To this end, participants were asked to complete a series of matrix questions broken down into five engagement strategy categories; social justice in the learning environment, social justice in the community, directly teaching social justice, relating with social justice, and modeling social justice. At the end of each matrix question participants were asked to indicate how often they employed strategies from that category. During analysis, data from these questions was separated into three categories: responses from professionals, from parents, and from those who identified as both. This distinction is important in understanding the data because parents and professionals have a notable difference in their level of early childhood training and education, the relationships with the children they care for, and in the environments they create for learning. In order to create an easily comparable set of data, the value indicators were each assigned a number. For example, one extreme, “not at all important,” was assigned the value of one and the other extreme, “extremely important,” was assigned the value of five. Using the assigned values, I calculated the average response for each of the three respondent categories and then plotted them on bar graphs to provide a visual indicator of how valuable the respondents found each engagement strategy.
Content question three gathered data related to the learning environment. Participant responses reflected a strong value for children’s books and toys including people props and pretend play items. Parents valued television programs notably more than professionals, while professionals showed a stronger value for art materials and physical setup. Professionals were more likely to engage with children in this way multiple times a day while parents ranged between daily and a few times a week. This data is depicted in Figure 4 above.
As discussed previously, using the community as an engagement strategy was the only strategy included in the survey that was not listed by participants. This strategy, which was evaluated in content question four, also received the lowest overall value from participants. Involvement from family and friends was listed as one of the top values in this category along with the diversity of the children the toddlers spend time with. Parents were much more likely to rate community presence as an extreme value, while professionals valued guest speakers more. There was a wide difference in likelihood of implementing this as a strategy to engage in social justice with toddlers, ranging from “multiple times a day” to “whenever I think of it.” This data is presented in Figure 5, above.
Content Question five looked at direct teaching as a strategy, and the majority of all respondents highly valued establishing expectations of just behavior and teaching games that promote socially just behaviors. Parents indicated more differences regarding the value of implementing a curriculum or parenting method as well as supporting projects and experiments focusing on social justice, while teachers were more likely to report both of these categories as fairly important. Each respondent was enthusiastically in support of giving in the moment responses that promote socially just behavior. Roughly 60% of respondents were likely to use direct teaching as a way to promote social justice at least daily, with the majority using it multiple times a day. This information is presented in figure 6 above.
The way caregivers use the adult/child relationship to convey social justice practices and ideas was examined in content question six. The majority of participants showed similar responses regarding their use of relating with social justice. Every respondent highly valued discipline, encouragement, verbal communication, listening and responding to toddlers, with a majority of responses showing an “extremely valuable” demarcation. Also in this category, 77% of respondents said they were likely to use this method multiple times a day. This data is presented in Figure 7 above.
Content question seven was notably different from the other four categories, in that 95% of all responses in the category of modeling social justice were marked as highly valued with 85% falling into the “extremely important” category. Additionally twenty-three caregivers said they were using modeling as an engagement strategy multiple times a day. This is shown in figure 8 above.

Content question eight assessed the limitations and barriers caregivers have that prevent them from fully engaging in social justice with toddlers. The most frequently mentioned limitation impacted nearly half of the respondents, professionals and parents alike. Fifteen participants indicated that they are unable to fully engage in social justice with toddlers the way they want to because “just getting through the daily routine takes all [their] time and energy.” The second largest limitation is lack of a good curriculum or adequate resources to draw from. This response came from both parents and
professionals, eliminating the possibility that some caretakers just do not know where to look for the good resources, but rather it suggests a genuine lack of quality resources. Parents were more likely to respond that they did not feel like they had enough time while professionals were more likely to respond that there was a language barrier. Interestingly, eight respondents, comprised of both parents and professionals, felt that the toddler’s other caretakers were not “on board” with exploring social justice. Finally, 25% of respondents felt that they had no challenges in this area and many comments expressed pride in the work they do with children in this area. This information is presented in Figure 9 below.

**Figure 9: Content Question 8, Participant Identified Limitations and Barriers**

In order to better understand what is inspiring caregivers in their social justice work with their toddlers, they were asked to be as specific as possible and to list the
various resources they use. Despite asking people to be specific, most gave general categorical responses. Children’s books were mentioned eleven times, TV shows (specifically Daniel Tiger) was mentioned four times, Facebook was mentioned three times. Resources mentioned twice include; posters, religious texts, Pinterest, adult education courses, You Tube, and attending events. Clearly this is a slim list and very little of it directly supports the engagement strategies most valued by the caregivers.

When caregivers were asked what resources they would like to have, the responses fell primarily into four categories; social change, relevant materials for children, adult education, and lists. While participants recognized that social change was perhaps a bit too lofty to wish for as a resource, four of them still took the time to explain what changes they would like to see:

“A world that didn't require so many of these hard conversations.”

“Diverse caregivers at each school.”

“Communities made up of diverse families.”

“More money to spend.”

A few respondents also wanted more early education schools and children’s community groups that focus on social justice. Some people mentioned a desire for children’s games and books that break away from normative values and explore today’s social justice issues from a perspective relevant to toddlers. Adult education was a highly sought after resource including focused curriculums, trainings, videos, classes, forums, email listserves, and websites. However, the most common response to this question was, “I want a list.” Parents and professionals both asked for an incredibly simple resource; a list of
books, songs, activities and events. They also wanted lists of age-appropriate ways to discuss social justice with a toddler that includes information about when these discussions can have the most impact.

When asked to give toddlers a message about social justice, the participants responded so similarly that many of them were near identical quotes. Their messages were empowering and poetic, strong and full of promise. While I would like to list every response here, they can easily be summarized since each one is so similar in its core: Love yourself, love other people, and treat everyone the way you want to be treated.

As to be expected there were some limitations to this study. While fifty-two people began the survey, forty-seven continued past the initial consent question, and only thirty-one finished it to completion. This made for a very small sample size, perhaps too small to draw any widely applicable conclusions. It also raises the question of why so many respondents decided to stop taking the survey. As expected, the respondents were fairly similar demographically both to one another and to me. The large majority of participants identified as heterosexual, white, middle class, temporarily-abled, females between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-four. There was a near even split of religious beliefs with sixteen identifying as some type of Christian and fifteen identifying as being non-religious. The huge lack in diverse voices greatly limits the scope of this survey.
Discussion

While the small sample size and similar demographic composition of the participants limit the scope and general applicability of this survey, some conclusions can still be drawn regarding the knowledge and values of caregivers working with toddlers. This survey was successful in providing answers to the research questions as well as illuminating some helpful next steps for others wishing to research or work in this field.

One goal of this study was to gather some data regarding the knowledge caregivers have about social justice. Clearly all of the participants had some working knowledge of social justice, primarily centered on the idea of treating other people equally despite specific demographic differences. While some participants did elaborate on this basic definition, most people did not express a nuanced perspective. When it came to applying social justice to their work with toddlers, however, the responses were much more detailed and elaborate. Not only did they expand their definitions of social justice to include concepts such as self-esteem and privilege, but they also went beyond the typical social justice issues and mentioned less common issues such as language, age, family composition, and violence. Even more interesting is that the participants listed the strategies they use to engage their toddlers in social justice and their list included direct teaching, diverse friendships, modeling behaviors, using books/shows/toys, and relating with understanding and communication. These are more or less the same five engagement strategies I asked participants to reflect on in the next section of the survey. In fact, the most commonly listed engagement strategies mentioned in the short answer question were modeling, discussion, and understanding, which were also the most highly valued categories later in the survey. All of this supports the idea that caregivers are
actually well informed and skilled at engaging their toddlers in social justice, but are not aware they are doing so. Helping caregivers to see the successful social justice work they are already doing through a new lenses could dramatically help improve their morale and increase their motivation to continue this critical work.

Research supports the idea that children gain skills and knowledge quicker when they are engaged with a caregiver who feels passionately about the subject. (NAEYC, 2014). This knowledge should reinforce the idea that toddlers depend on relationships with their primary caregivers to learn not only about academic topics but also about other things, including social justice concepts. Most children who develop a love of reading had a caregiver who also enjoyed reading and who was willing to read the child endless stories each day (NAEYC, 2014). Similarly, children who value social justice and develop the skills to engage in age-appropriate pursuits for justice have caregivers who feel passionately about social justice issues. This lays a heavy responsibility on caregivers to not only teach social justice but to also value it in their own lives and to do the intense inner-work that social justice requires. While asking all caregivers to engage in their own social-justice journey is a beautiful goal, it is highly unrealistic. In the meantime, creating more early education schools and programs that focus on social justice and requiring professional caregivers to have some type of training in social justice can help ensure that more children are given exposure to social justice education. Additionally, creating more resources for parents to use can also encourage social justice learning at home.

Simply creating the resources, however, will not eliminate some of the barriers and limitations that participants expressed in the survey. The most frequently listed
barrier standing in the way of caregivers was “just getting us through the daily routine takes all my time an energy.” No further research is needed to explain this; taking care of toddlers is hard. Just keeping them fed, rested, clean and safe often requires the caregiver’s full attention and is a physical, mental, and emotional endeavor on its own. Of course the thought of adding more to the daily routine can seem impossible. This is why more work needs to be done to help caregivers understand that engaging in social justice with toddlers doesn’t necessarily require anything extra. Due to the nature of social justice work, it can easily be supported through organic relational aspects of the adult/child relationship. All young children learn the basics of language simply by being spoken to and engaged in conversations, and in the same way, all young children can learn the basics of social justice in the context of a just, fair, and compassionate relationship with their caregivers. Most caregivers spend a significant amount of time helping their child to become kind, fair, gentle, and respectful people. These caregivers are already engaging in social justice with their toddlers, this survey shows that many of them just do not realize it.

I believe that this research presents a strong case for further action in the field of social justice education for young children on the part of professionals as well as administrators working in early childhood education programs. This survey demonstrates that many caregivers value social justice and are willing to engage in it with their toddlers, but they do not know how to go about it. Easily accessible websites need to be created that focus on social justice and that contain video seminars, training and event calendars, and lists of other resources pertinent to toddlers. Additionally, more work can
be done to make caregivers aware of the ways they are already bringing social justice themes into their every day routines and conversations with toddlers.

Finally, there is still a very large data gap when looking at toddlers and social justice research. With the help developmental research, more caregivers are realizing how just how valuable and formative early childhood is, and they are looking for research-based ways to engage in social justice with toddlers during this key developmental period. It is time now to conduct much more research, specifically empirical research, surrounding the effects of implementing equity pedagogy in early education classrooms. Studies already show the profoundly positive impact of investing in young children’s education and social-emotional wellbeing (Heckman & Masterov, 2007), as well as the ability for early life experiences to directly correlate to the health and lifestyle of adults twenty to thirty years later (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). A significant increase in research focused on early engagement with social justice can help secure the attention and funding needed to support the creation of lasting change towards a more just society.

Overall, my research concludes that despite the lack of much needed academic research and quality educational materials, caregivers are instinctively engaging their toddlers in social justice. These caregivers rightly desire easily accessible information and resource support to deepen the social justice work they do, and want to do, with children. Additionally, they are so fatigued from working endlessly to provide their tireless toddlers with excellent care that they do not even realize that they are already much of the social justice work that is so important for young children.
Bibliography


Appendix 1: Invitation to participate in the survey

Dear Caregiver,

I am conducting research to earn my Masters degree and I need your help! My capstone project focuses on caregivers engaging in social justice with toddlers. Just to be clear, for the sake of this research:

- **Caregivers**: Parents, nannies, childcare providers, educators, teachers.
- **Social Justice**: The practice of ensuring that all people in society are treated equitably with the protection of human rights and provision of resources, regardless of status, privilege or power.
- **Toddlers**: Children ages 1, 2, and 3 years old.

**Why this work?**
There has been a recent influx in social justice work that brings issues like anti-bullying, peace and conflict resolution, environmental justice, and human rights into elementary and preschool classrooms as well as parenting literature. However, when I wanted to dig deeper and find ideas about how to do social justice work with toddlers, everything went quiet. I think that many caregivers ARE engaging in social justice work with their toddlers and that many more caregivers WANT to but they have some barriers preventing them from doing it.

**How you can help.**
I want to deliver this message in my capstone work, but I cannot just say it, I need to PROVE it. If you will share 20-30 minutes of your valuable time to fill out my survey I will have the data I need to show off the incredible work we do with toddlers and to advocate for more resources to help us do it even better!

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Social_justice_with_toddlers](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Social_justice_with_toddlers)

You can follow the above link and check things out. The initial consent page has a bit more information but if you still have questions you can always email me at Susan.nasiombe@mail.sit.edu. If you don’t want to take the survey or don’t have time, it’s absolutely ok. Everything is anonymous, so I won’t know anyway. 😊 Please let other toddler caregivers know about the survey too, by forwarding them this email. The more voices I hear the more complete the data will be.

Thank you for the work you do and for helping me complete my research!
Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

The purpose of this study is to generate information regarding caregivers’ experiences and perspectives regarding engaging in social justice with toddlers. The information will be used in a graduate level capstone project with no current intention of being published. The questions will all focus on work with toddlers, with the exception of a few demographic questions that are not required to complete the survey.

This entirely anonymous survey should take 20-30 minutes to complete, but there is no time limit so take as long as you need. Questions are primarily in short answer or rating scale format. There is no “right” or “wrong” responses to these questions, simply share what makes the most sense for you. (It’s even ok to say you’re confused or don’t really know what to say.) You may skip any part of the survey that you would like to, but please be honest in any responses that you do choose to give.

There are no expected risks or discomforts for participants. However, if at any point you feel uncomfortable with a question you may choose to skip it or explain your discomfort in the comment section.

There is very little data currently connected with toddlers and social justice work. Your participation in this survey will contribute to filling a large information gap in the current research and literature. If you would like to receive a summary of results or if you have any questions, concerns or additional information you would like to share regarding this research you may send an email to susan.nasiombe@mail.sit.edu

Additionally, if you have concerns or questions about the nature of this research you may contact my academic advisor Dr. Karen Blanchard at 802-258-3322

By taking and submitting this survey, you are acknowledging that you have been informed of the nature of the survey and you provide your consent to participate. Thank you so much for your time and responses!

1. I have read the above statements and understand that my participation is voluntary and I give my consent to participate.
Appendix 3: Copy of Survey

Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

Welcome to My Survey

The purpose of this study is to generate information regarding caregivers’ experiences and perspectives regarding engaging in social justice with toddlers. The information will be used in a graduate level capstone project with no current intention of being published. The questions will all focus on work with toddlers, with the exception of a few demographic questions that are not required to complete the survey.

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There are no expected risks or discomforts for participants. However, if at any point you feel uncomfortable with a question you may choose to skip it or explain your discomfort in the comment section.

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1. I have read the above statements and understand that my participation is voluntary and I give my consent to participate.

☐
Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

Caregiving for Toddlers

2. For the purpose of this study the term “caregiver” refers to an adult who is either a custodial parent/guardian of a current toddler or an adult who provides regular care and/or education to a toddler in a professional context (teacher, child care provider, educator, or nanny). In some cases you may qualify in multiple ways.

Please tell me which caregiving roles you have:

3. For this study I'll use the term “toddler” to be a child age 1, 2, or 3 years old. How old are the toddler(s) you care for? Mark all that apply!

- One year olds (13-23 months)
- Two year olds (24-35 months)
- Three year olds (36-47 months)

4. How long have you been caring for toddlers?

5. On a typical day how many toddlers are you caring for at a time?

6. Are you caring for anyone else while also caring for the toddler(s)? If so, please indicate the age and amount of children you care for.

Example: 1 three month old, and 2 four year olds.
### Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

#### Social Justice with Toddlers

7. In this study the term "Social Justice" will mean "The practice of ensuring that all people in society are treated equitably with the protection of human rights and provision of resources, regardless of status, privilege or power."

Tell me what social justice means to you.

8. Engaging in social justice with toddlers can take many different forms. What does it currently look like for you and the toddler(s) you care for?

9. What social justice elements have you done differently in the past, or hope to try out in the future?
10. When it comes to engaging in social justice with toddlers, how important would you say the following learning environment factors are in your practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>A little important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s books showing diversity or exploring social justice concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV shows, movies, or songs showing diversity or exploring social justice concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A range of diverse people prop toys, action figures, and baby dolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretend play items (such as dress-up clothes, props, and pretend food dishes) that support respectful exploration of ethnicities, gender, age, professional roles, ability, etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art materials that reflect a range of skin tones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical set up and decorations that reflect a diverse range of people and/or cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Overall, how consistently do you use your learning environment to intentionally engage in social justice issues with your toddler(s)?
Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

Social Justice in the Community

12. When it comes to engaging in social justice with toddlers, how important would you say the following community factors are in your practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>A Little Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being present and involved in your community/neighborhood</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going on field trips/ outings</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having visitors or guest speakers come to your homeschool</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement from family members/ friends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The diversity of children you're around each day</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The diversity of caregivers you're around each day</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Overall, how consistently do you use your community to intentionally engage in social justice issues with your toddler(s)?

[ ]

[ ]
### Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

#### Directly Teaching Social Justice

14. When it comes to engaging in social justice with toddlers, how important would you say the following direct teaching factors are in your practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>A little important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing expectations of socially just behavior through rules, policies, values</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing a curriculum, parenting method, pedagogy that focuses on social justice concepts</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving in-the-moment responses that promote socially just behaviors (e.g. &quot;It's ok to be angry, it's not ok to bite people,&quot; or &quot;It was kind of you to make sure she had enough blocks.&quot;)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching games that promote socially just behavior</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting or leading projects/experiments that focus on social justice concepts</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Overall, how consistently do you use direct teaching to intentionally engage in social justice issues with your toddler(s)?

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### Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

#### Relating with Social Justice

16. When it comes to engaging in social justice with toddlers, how important would you say the following relational factors are in your practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>A little important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way you discipline/correct/guide your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you praise/encourage/promote your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you make decisions that directly impact your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The way you schedule the time with your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The way you non-verbally communicate with your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you verbally communicate with your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you listen to your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you respond to your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The level of independence you expect your toddler(s) to have</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Overall, how consistently do you use relational factors to intentionally engage in social justice issues with your toddler(s)?

[Dropdown]

[Blank Line]
### Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

#### Modeling Social Justice

18. When it comes to engaging in social justice with toddlers, how important would you say the following modeling factors are in your practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>A Little Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way you interact with other children in front of your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you interact with the toddler's other caregivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adult conversations you have in front of your toddler(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The level to which &quot;the rules&quot; apply to your own behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way you do or don't express your own big emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Overall, how consistently do you use modeling factors to intentionally engage in social justice issues with your toddler(s)?


## Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

### Limitations/Barriers

20. What are your biggest challenges when it comes to engaging in social justice with your toddler(s)? Mark all that apply.

- [ ] There's not enough time
- [ ] It's too expensive
- [ ] It's low on my priority list
- [ ] I don't think it's really applies to children this age
- [ ] I forget to
- [ ] It brings up uncomfortable emotions for me
- [ ] I'm not really sure how
- [ ] My toddler's other caregivers are not on board
- [ ] I don't think my toddler(s) understands it
- [ ] It's uncomfortable because I'm different than my toddler(s) or their other caregivers
- [ ] There's a language barrier
- [ ] I'm worried I'll be viewed as "extreme," or a "hippy," or "not politically correct"
- [ ] Social justice issues aren't that important to me
- [ ] I don't think it's my responsibility to engage in this with my toddler(s)
- [ ] There isn't a good curriculum/resource for me to draw from
- [ ] Just getting us through the daily routine takes all my time and energy
- [ ] I don't feel like I have any challenges in this area
- [ ] Other (please specify):

  ```
  
  ```
21. What resources have you/do you use to support the social justice work you do with your toddler(s)?

This can be books, websites, speakers, curriculum, blogs, people, theories, Pinterest boards, magazines, catalogues, really anything that has inspired you to engage in social justice work with toddlers - the more specific the better!

22. What resources do you wish existed to support you in the social justice work you do (or would like to do) with your toddler(s)?
Engaging in Social Justice with Toddlers

A Word to the Wise

23. Finally, if you could give toddlers any message about social justice what would it be?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. How do you gender identify?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. What is your age?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. What is your education level?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. How do you identify racially/ethnically?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Do you identify with any religion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Please describe your sexual orientation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Please describe your socio-economic class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Do you have a disability or are you differently-abled?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Overall, how similar are you to the toddler(s) you care for.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thank you so much for taking your time to respond to this survey!
Again, if you have any questions, concerns, additional comments or would like a summary of my results, you may contact me at:  Susan.Naslombe@slt.mall.edu