

Making Our Stance on Social Justice Education Explicit

Social justice education is at the heart of the work I do in schools, and in the past couple of days, one of my mentors, Dr. Maya Soetoro-Ng, reminded me of the importance of coming together with others to make this mission explicit. In correspondence from her position at the [Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution](#), she called on various organizations to post statements on their websites, social media platforms and other spaces of influence and connection that directly speak to their commitment to education for the enhancement of civil liberties, social justice and peace. In this message, she encouraged all of us to explicitly state:

We are part of an American institution of culture and conscience. Our mission speaks broadly of the commitment to human rights, civil liberties, environmental stewardship and positive peace. In order to nourish these commitments, we seek to deepen our understanding of one another and our common humanity, to learn of and teach about the powerful experiences and universal needs of myriad and diverse peoples. We are firmly against any action that discriminates against or unfairly targets refugees, immigrants, women, native peoples, people of color, Arabs and Muslims, because such actions undermine the integrity of the nation and fail to reflect the moral courage that is owed to its people.

I instantly felt that, by communicating this clear and common stance in writing across the communities and organizations we work in, our collective capacity for working together to create positive change grew stronger.

This is the power of a shared message, and it is one of the core reasons I am deeply attracted to Teaching Tolerance's [Social Justice Standards](#). "The standards provide a common language and organizational structure," Teaching Tolerance states. "Teachers can use them to guide curriculum development and administrators can use them to make schools more just, equitable and safe." Through their theoretically sound origins and well-articulated continuum of engagement, the language embedded within the four domains of the standards—Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action—has the potential to link social justice educators across grade levels, geographic regions, diverse populations and public and private settings.

Just imagine what would happen if state departments of education and independent schools across the nation used these standards to reframe the daily experiences of students and teachers. Perhaps we would move one step closer to ensuring "the basic [educational] need for the whole spectrum of thinking/feeling competencies to be taught to all students, regardless of gender and other cultural variables," as anti-bias education pioneer Emily Style writes in "Curriculum as Window and Mirror." Maybe then, all of our young people would have access to both the critical content and social emotional approach to teaching and learning that is necessary for building a more empathetic, inclusive and just society.

With this in mind, my colleagues and I at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's (UHM) College of Education [Institute for Teacher Education \(ITE\) Secondary Program](#) decided to use the Social Justice Standards to redesign our teacher education program. Grounded in a commitment to creating an equitable and socially just society, this program will provide our teacher candidates with a transformative learning experience. Specifically, the program will help candidates develop a deep wisdom for teaching. That teaching will be rooted in place and community action, which will in turn serve as a foundation for sparking their future students' wonder and imagination about how to live in the world. The program will also prepare teachers who will contribute to cultivating schools and learning experiences that provide students with opportunities to create a compassionate democratic society.

With the Social Justice Standards at the foundation of our program redesign, we have been able to come together with a clear and common language for

creating program activities, coursework, curriculum and assessments. Additionally, we have a collective voice for communicating what we mean by social justice education to the university faculty, teacher candidates, K–12 teachers and students, and larger communities that we work with.

Just as Dr. Soetoro–Ng and my colleagues in the UHM ITE Secondary Program have done, now is the time for all of us to make our collective stance on social justice education explicit. With resources like the Social Justice Standards, we have the tools we need to, as Teaching Tolerance encourages, “plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world.” In the words of Mary Kawena Pukui, “‘A ‘ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia:” No task is too big when done together by all.

Makaiau is an associate specialist at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa College of Education Institute for Teacher Education Secondary Program and the director of curriculum and research at the University of Hawai‘i Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education.