

Theory of Social Change

The two areas of social injustice that I focus on in my everyday life are educational justice specifically for people who are put at a disadvantage. I work at Auburn Middle School primarily with students who have learning disabilities, or students labeled as “troublemakers”. At Clark, I work with adults and youth who served time in prison. My whole life I have been fighting for my family members who are on the autism spectrum, to be treated well in public schools. People with special needs have for a long time been my only interest when it comes to equal and just education. It was not until I got older, that my area of social justice interest would segway to people with special needs, and people who are convicted of crimes. I did not realize until I entered my first year of college, that people with special needs are criminalized in public school, like my sister was. So, my two interests intersected. Eventually, I would like to be a teacher at a public school in Worcester or a juvenile facility. I have learned that disadvantaged schools are the ones that need teachers who are looking to create and maintain radical change. And I believe that radical change starts with empathetic teachers. Urban schools need teachers who *care*.

I am not speaking for every teacher when I say this, however, I’ve had teachers who I never want to see again, and teachers that have inspired me to do this work. What I mean by empathetic teachers are teachers who are patient and caring towards their students. I have come in contact with classroom spaces where the teacher yells at the students when they ask questions because they are annoyed they aren't understanding. I’ve seen a student getting aimlessly harassed in a classroom and the teacher just looks the other way. Our public school system needs teachers who are caring and tough, to be able to show deep empathy for students while also keeping them on track.

I had a couple of friends in high school who struggled in school with their behavior and schoolwork. They were great people, they just struggled. I found out that they suffered from depression and PTSD from being a victim of the foster care system. They lived in a group home in my town known for housing girls with “behavioral problems”. Back then, I got to know a couple of the girls who lived there on a personal level, I even went over to the group home to hang out with them. I learned that some of them were there because they committed misdemeanor crimes and were taken out of other group homes. These girls were my friends and I was confused as to how they had all these charges. I never felt unsafe with them, they were generous kids like me, who just had a rough go at life. The largest difference between us though, was I had the support of my family keeping me on track.

When I started college, my major was criminal justice. After a semester of realizing I wanted to nurture people and not police them, I decided I would become a teacher instead. I learned from my first semester of criminal justice classes, living in Salem Massachusetts, and taking part in an at-risk youth mentor program, that crime prevention starts with youth in school and with their families. I also have a love for english and creative writing. I learned through this mentor program that having the students write about their feelings or trauma, can make them feel better and create community. Literature and writing connects people and I love it.

In my first essay, I discussed my devotion to special needs people and a bit about my work at Clark for the LARC program. I am most interested in these two areas of oppression because I believe that by not having proper empathetic care in public schools, these two groups of students are more likely to fail. I have seen it with my own eyes. As for what makes me a good candidate to be a teacher, there are so, so many things about me!

Overall, I know that I am a good human being. The way that I was raised by my mother and growing up with special needs people has made me an empathetic and patient person. My mom taught me to treat everyone with kindness and to stand up for yourself when necessary. I think the most important thing she taught me is that people in roles of authority sometimes deserve to get put in their place. She taught me just because someone is an educator, does not mean that they automatically get respect, it is earned. I am working in a school right now and I want to be there every day. I communicate with my students to tell me when I upset them and to keep an open dialogue with me. Even though I am only there with them for a couple times a week, I have learned that by establishing these unspoken agreements, the students are more likely to trust and listen to me. I already know I want to be a teacher. I plan on getting my master's degree in teaching and becoming a teacher in a public school. I want to be the type of teacher that the CYES major is trying to create. I want to work with the age range of 12-14 and with students who have disadvantages that cause them to fall behind in school. I strive to be a mentor-based teacher who does not lash out at students and to be a teacher that I wish the people I love had when they were in school.

The people I love drive me to create change. The people who are different in our world drive me to create change. I want to create a classroom space where there will be no yelling, no bullying, and everything a student needs to thrive will be present. When I was in school, it felt like a prison. We were not allowed to hang anything on the walls, students weren't allowed to eat snacks, and teachers were lashing out at us every single day. I want to create a colorful space where my students feel safe to ask questions and be vulnerable. I want to focus on the system of restorative justice and open dialogue. Talking in a calm space about what a student needs and

what upsets them can change that child's outlook on school. I have been in all types of schools in all types of environments. I found that I enjoy being around students who are labeled as "a problem." I find them well mannered, respectful, and a lot funnier than mainstream students. These students are the ones that public schools are failing. The students I love being with the most. The students who have changed my life for the better, are being ostracized in the classroom for factors they themselves cannot control. Ultimately, I want to take a nurturing approach to teaching because the people I love never had that growing up and I experienced how it has impacted their adult lives.