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Valuing Students' Responses to Implement a Social Justice Pedagogy: A Descriptive Case Study

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Abstract: An extensive body of research focuses on early-career and pre-service teacher identities, with the underlying assumption that veteran teachers are entrenched in particular mindsets and thus, less likely to explore or learn from social justice pedagogies. Guided by Crenshaw's concept of a "single-axis framework," the authors argue in this paper that the experiences of Jacob, a 30-year veteran educator, disrupts the assumptions that social justice research is limited to neophyte teachers and demonstrates the degrees to which even highly skilled and experienced teachers might interrogate their practices to better advance social justice education that centers students' identities as imperative driving forces in pursuing and achieving social justice. To grasp the significance of centering students' identities as driving forces in pursuing and achieving social justice, we draw on and synthesize multiple threads of literature, and then present and analyze a descriptive case study through ethnographic fieldnotes, a focus group interview, and conversational interviews, in an effort to bridge the divides between pedagogy and practice.

Keywords: social justice, teacher identity, student identity, case study

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Introduction[1]

"I'm beginning to realize that I've been stuck in the past. Like, I'm trying to keep social justice in the forefront of what and how I teach, but I know now that that wasn't what I was doing," Jacob[2], a high school cultural literacies teacher, told Stephanie as he sighed. Jacob's comment on his pedagogy came after he had gathered student feedback at the end of a week-long course titled "Social Justice Issues in the United States." Jacob had been excited about the class and its content, and he had told first author Stephanie on the previous day that he was looking forward to gathering students' reactions at the end of class—particularly since he anticipated offering the class to a different group of students in a couple of weeks. It was not that students' reactions were negative; it was that students were frustrated with the lack of diversity in a class that touted an emphasis on social justice.

Frequently, the concept of educating for "social justice" reverberates throughout both classrooms and within the world of academia (e.g., Fylkesnes, 2018; Gregson, 2013; Henning, 2013; Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017). This conversation is critical, as student demographics continue to shift in U.S. schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2017), there is a strong mismatch between the teaching force and the students whom they teach. The majority of America's nearly four-million public school educators are predominately white, at least middle class, able-bodied, native-born speakers of U.S. English, and frequently self-identify as cisgender and heterosexual (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Meanwhile, the nation's 50.4 million public school students are increasingly diverse in nearly all of those categories.

Nationally, 25.9 million—over half—of U.S. students are children of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), a shift from previous years' data when both teachers and students were majority white. There is ever-increasing socioeconomic status (SES) stratification in schools, too, with lower income students falling behind all other SES groups in all academic categories (American Psychological Association, 2018). Nearly 14 million students are classified as having a diagnosed disability, over 25% of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), and a number of those deemed "disabled" are the consistently growing populations of English Language Learners (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). And adding to these substantial shifts in U.S. education, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other gender and sexuality non-conforming (LGBTQ+) students are more and more visible and vulnerable in classrooms (GLSEN, 2016; Shelton & Lester, 2018). These statistics argue for the importance of incorporating considerations and discussions of diversity and of social justice in both educational practice and research.

In response to this need, this paper centers on Jacob and his pedagogical efforts within his "Social Justice Issues in the United States" class. The data presented here are part of an extensive data corpus that spanned several years and considered the ways that faculty's participations in a residential secondary education summer enrichment program

[1] We readily acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we might use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this article we will use pronouns corresponding to the self-identifications of "Jacob," who is the focus of the paper, and of the co-authors. In instances when a gendered pronoun reference is unnecessary, we use "they," though there is a section in one field note when the authors use pronouns based on Jacob's confirmation of students' self-asserted genders.

[2] "Jacob" is a pseudonym. Data are anonymized throughout the paper to protect the identities of people, locations, and related information.

shaped their instructional choices and teacher identities. Jacob became our solitary focal point for this paper due to the ways that his experiences speak to and extend examinations of the realities of and need for social justice instruction in classrooms. His unique but essential efforts worked to use a literacy-based classroom to promote social justice topics. As a result of our focus on Jacob, the guiding research questions for this study were,

> 1) How does Jacob's personal identity inform his instructional decisions in a social justice issues course?
> 2) How do Jacob's students' identities inform his instructional decisions in the course?

Contexts

Though issues of social justice are pervasive in education, we recognize that a paper concentrating on one teacher's pedagogical efforts and reflections requires substantial context, and because so much of what we discuss in the paper is contingent on this contextualization, we situate the remainder of the paper within the following discussion of Jacob and his surroundings.

Setting

Jacob was one of approximately 60 faculty members in a residential summer enrichment program for high school juniors and seniors, in a metropolitan city in the Southeastern United States. The program was tuition-free, due to both state and private funding sources, and it offered courses in a range of academic and fine arts courses, including engineering, dance, Mandarin Chinese, and astronomy—30 in total. Students gained entry to the program through highly selective interview/audition processes that included school-, district-, and state-level competitions. Of those eligible statewide, less than 1% ultimately earned admission into the program, making the entire student body of the program approximately 600 students. The program's schedule divided students' class time into two parts: the first four hours of the day were spent in whatever discipline had earned each student their spot in the program—presumably a subject in which they excelled; the final two hours of each day were spent in an elective of each student's choosing—ideally a subject with which students had little or no expertise, in order to provide new opportunities with no risk of academic failure.

The program's residential component placed all faculty members and students on a single college campus for the duration of the nearly six-week summer program. Jacob and his peers lived together in a faculty dormitory, and the students were distributed across multiple dorms. All class and ancillary buildings, including a dining hall and several venues for student performances, were in walking distance of the living spaces, which provided the program with both a tight-knit sense of community and a collegiate atmosphere for the high school students.

Because the program was considered an enrichment opportunity, the program neither assigned student grades nor mandated any form of testing. As a result, faculty and students were both free to explore a range of different topics, with faculty unencumbered by the grind of grading and testing preparation, and students unfettered from concern for their GPAs. While courses were expected to be challenging, the program was, as one faculty member described it during a focus group, "a place to play—for students and teachers to be their best selves and not worry about test scores or grades or any of the other nonsense that sucks joy out of school. It's learning for the sake of learning here."

Participant

Outside the summer program's context, Jacob had been a high school teacher, and eventually a department chair. He had worked in both English Language Arts and Social Studies Departments for over 30 years, before retiring. He had begun teaching in the mid-1980s, and as a result of the range of years during which he had taught, he had experienced a number of major educational shifts that had informed his praxis. He had, for example, seen the advent of the Teach for America (TFA) teacher certification program, K-12 charter schools, and K-12 high-stakes standardized testing. When reflecting on these moments and others, he had noted that many of the changes that he had observed as a long-serving teacher had worked both to de-skill the teaching profession and to position all students as a monolithic population. For example, he had noted during an interview that "both TFA and standardized tests assume that teachers only do their jobs if they're supervised by non-teachers, and that their kids are all the same and need the same thing, so one test for all kids and one training program for all teachers of those kids."

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Relatedly, he had been involved in school-based professional learning communities that had read then-groundbreaking social justice texts, such as Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities* and Banks's (1996) *Multicultural Education: Transformative Knowledge and Action*—both writings that had shifted discussions and scholarship on social justice in schooling. He had, especially as a department chair, advocated that books exploring issues of inequality and diversity be the bases of teachers' professional development in his school and department.

Outside school, Jacob was an active advocate and volunteer for a range of organizations that promoted social justice. He had dedicated innumerable hours and dollars to political campaigns that he believed supported teachers, students, and schools—particularly candidates who opposed measures such as mandated student testing and English language-only curricula. He also participated in a range of social movements, including demanding federal government funding for the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, the implementation of free pre-K programs in the 1990s, and the repeal of the No Child Left Behind Act of the early 2000s. Given that the summer program in which this research took place operated without elements that he had lobbied against, such as testing and strict teacher oversight, and permitted teacher-created curricula on controversial topics—including another teacher's successful course on literature related to the HIV/AIDS crisis when Jacob was hired—Jacob felt that this summer program was an opportunity to, as he put it, "be a teacher without all the bullshit of tests, nonsense student assemblies, and so on."

He had begun teaching in the summer program approximately 15 years ago, though personal situations had necessitated taking some summers off, so that at the time of data collection, he had worked in the program for a total of 10 years, during which he had served as a department chair for 5 years. Within the program, he taught in what was designated a "literacies" department, with the discipline being broadly conceived. The program's

only content mandates to faculty were that course materials 1) be appropriate for intellectually and artistically advanced teenagers and 2) be significantly different from what students likely experienced, in terms of typical secondary school curricular mandates, in their high schools during the regular fall/spring academic calendar. Jacob and his four other department members met at least three times each year prior to the program's start, to discuss their planned offerings and to ensure complementary and valuable experiences for the students who took classes in their department, at both advanced and introductory levels.

In order to ensure a wide array of courses, each member of Jacob's department offered three sets of six-day classes each week. The first two classes were offered during the morning session, when students were expected to be advanced in the discipline; the third course was the two-hour afternoon elective, which was designed to be introductory-level. Jacob predominately taught courses that emphasized forms of cultural literacies, which he understood to mean that students were learning "an awareness of and sensitivity to diverse cultures and lifestyles" (Hernandez, 2016, p. 20), which Jacob maintained were inextricably linked to issues of social justice. During the summer in which this research took place, Jacob offered his "Social Justice Issues in the United States" course in the program's first week to the advanced students, along with an advanced reading course on modern drama and an introductory course on playwriting and performance. While all of Jacob's courses were carefully designed and implemented, the "Social Justice Issues in the United States" course is the focus here because it was the course that proved most challenging and valuable to Jacob as an educator.

Literature Review

Based on the guiding research questions, our review of relevant literature is divided into two sections. The first examines scholars' discussions of teacher identity in relation to classroom-based social justice efforts; the second examines student identities in connection to the same.

Teacher Identities and Social Justice

What is most noteworthy about the literature on teacher identities relative to social justice work is that a substantial body emphasizes pre-service teachers and teacher preparation programs; very few consider the implications of teacher identities informing in-service teachers' social justice efforts, particularly those of veteran teachers. Reflecting on the growing shifts in student demographics, Abbate-Vaughn (2005) considered ways that ethnic literacy programs might support teachers-in-training in appreciating the diversities present in their classrooms. In their study of the adoption and implementation of social justice pedagogies, Philip and Benin (2014) examined the ways that student teachers' whiteness reified and countered their understandings of racism in relation to their students. Boylan and Woolsey (2015) similarly explored the ways that pre-service teachers' identities mattered in adopting social justice-oriented pedagogies. Strong-Wilson, Johnston, Wiltse, Burke, Phipps, and Gonzalez (2014) noted in their discussion of pre-service teachers that participants' personal identities directly informed their responses to book-based depictions of inequality; for example, a LGBTQ+ student focused on a picture book about homophobia, and an Indigenous Newfoundland student emphasized the representations and absences of racial and ethnic groups in stories. In nearly every instance, the overall finding was that teacher identity directly informed what issues the participants believed were

meaningful and therefore worth addressing, and in nearly every instance, the emphasis was on pre-service or early career (i.e., immediately following certification and/or graduation) teachers.

Of the literature that does examine veteran in-service teachers (with "veteran" defined widely, if at all, across the research), an interesting shift from discussions of pre-service teachers was that researchers eschewed discussions of these teachers' identities as relevant, and instead tended to focus on their praxis and roles as mentors. Kelly, Brandes, and Orlowski (2003) researched exclusively on veteran English and social studies teachers with five or more years' experience, and though they took great care to note demographic information on the participants, those elements did not factor into the analysis. The researchers instead emphasized the means by which veteran status narrowed the ways that teachers conceptualized social justice, and on the efforts that teachers made to support social justice pedagogies in relation to schools' student bodies. Who the teachers were was not addressed as a significant factor in discussions of what they were doing. Similarly, Dover, Henning, and Agarwal-Rangnath (2016) interviewed veteran social studies teachers, with 1-20 years' experience, and centered specifically on curricular implementations and ways that veteran teachers might advise pre-service teachers. Riley and Solic (2017), in a similar effort to support pre-service teachers, connected student teachers with veteran teachers who had established "activist teacher communities" committed to social justice education (p. 179). In a slight deviation from veteran teachers serving as models and mentors to inexperienced educators, Rosine (2013) examined the ways that experienced educators might support novice principals in encouraging social justice measures in school buildings.

Across the literature, these discussions of veteran teachers adopted positions that assumed they had relatively stable identities that enabled them to carry out social justice-oriented teaching unproblematically, and therefore researchers prioritized teaching practices instead of the teachers themselves. Such a consistent stance honors veteran teachers' years of experiences but also creates a dichotomous divide within the profession. The literature seems to emphasize that pre-service teachers need to learn how to enact social justice pedagogies, and that veteran educators need to teach how to enact them. This position necessitates careful considerations of pre-service teachers' identities, in exploring what they need to learn, and how they will (or will not) adopt specific ideologies and practices; it ignores, however, veteran teachers' identities, because the emphasis on their craft inadvertently assumes that their teaching experiences have somehow solidified a clear professional identity, rather than acknowledging that both who they are and how they teach continue to evolve. In a rare example that counters this tendency, an article from the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* features Nieto (2013) framing her social justice efforts as an experienced educator as a collection of "aha moments" that happened over time and directly related to the ways that her identities and experiences had both limited and supported her social justice efforts in literacy classrooms and research. This one article of personal reflection, however, is an anomaly in overall considerations of experienced teachers' attempts to enact social justice.

In considering the applicable literature on teacher identities and social justice efforts, this paper extends existing scholarship on teacher identities in several significant ways. First, as noted, most discussions of teacher identity and social justice are centered on early-career and pre-service teachers (e.g., Boylan & Woolsey, 2015; Charles, 2017; Cho, 2017; Shelton, 2017; Shelton & Barnes, 2016). Aside from the preceding discussion on the ways that

research omits veteran teacher identities, a few scholars offer an alternative viewpoint. Kelly et al (2003), Meyer (2009), and Sleeter (1996) suggest that this emphasis on novice educators is due to the assumption that veteran teachers are entrenched in particular mindsets and therefore less likely to explore or learn from social justice pedagogies. Jacob, however, challenges this position, too. He was a 30-year teaching veteran who had worked within this particular summer program for a decade. Despite his veteran status, Jacob's course (and its initial failure) reflected his continually developing teaching identity, and the ways that he, his students, and colleagues shaped his instructional decisions.

Student Identities and Social Justice

The focus in this paper is on Jacob, but because students' feedback and identities were so critical to Jacob's reflective practice and course revisions, we consider research that examines students' identities in relation to social justice, too, to understand ways that this paper might matter to those conversations. As previously mentioned, there is extensive scholarship on pre-service teachers' identities; like the less explored area of veteran teachers' identities in social justice work, there is not a substantial body of literature that examines students' identities, either. It is not that scholars do not discuss students in relation to education and social justice issues; it is that most discussions examine students' roles in relation to the efficacy of curricular implementations rather than as independent agents who have their own positionalities and who directly influence teachers' identities and pedagogical choices. While this paper's emphasis on a teacher may seem at odds with such a distinction, it was ultimately students' feedback and voices that helped Jacob to implement a successful class.

Of the resources that are available in this area, the common thread is that, unsurprisingly but considerably, students' identities strongly influence the ways that they take up and respond to social justice topics in school settings. Douglas (2016) and VanHaitsma (2010) considered how students being labeled in deficit ways, such as having disabilities or developmental delays, directly informed both the ways that students engaged with school and how they understood and applied social justice concepts. In both instances, students worked to expand schooling to include more equitable and nuanced notions of the ways that students with unique needs might be better included in schooling.

"In short, no matter how well-intentioned teachers' efforts were to promote students' appreciation for difference, it was only when students' identities and experiences became the driving force behind instruction that real change occurred."

In a few instances, student identity not only worked to reshape understandings but to redefine pedagogies and classroom interactions. In Keddie's (2011) research with students of color, she found that students' Muslim identities were integral to not only promoting more inclusive educational spaces but in advancing students' self-advocacy and –efficacy in relation to social justice issues. In short, no matter how well-intentioned teachers' efforts were to promote students' appreciation for difference, it was only when students' identities and experiences became the driving force behind instruction that real change occurred. Sartor and Hill's (2013) study of TESOL classrooms determined that student identity was key to promoting real social justice, too. When teachers designed assignments that provided students opportunities to examine course goals

through the lenses of their personal identities, there was a greater of sense of community and inclusion for students and teachers in those classrooms. Similarly, Woodcock and Hardy's (2017) study of elementary and high school classrooms found that it was only when students' identities and input began to shape classroom spaces that teachers were able to move beyond surface-level notions and enactments of inclusion.

These studies argue powerfully for the value of students' voices, but there are few such discussions in the larger body of literature that consider students' identities as driving forces in the ways that educators pursue and achieve social justice. Though counterintuitive given our attention on Jacob, we argue that this paper is critical in discussions of students' identities and agency. Jacob's extensive experiences, leadership roles, and careful planning had been insufficient; it was only when Jacob sought out students' feedback that he began to appreciate the ways that his efforts had fallen short. As Jacob shifted the focal point of the class to include his students' identities, suggestions, and needs, the course achieved its goal of promoting social justice.

Theoretical Framework

Single-axis Framework

The intertwining of identities is the key component of intersectionality, and of Crenshaw's (1989) directly-related notion of a "single-axis framework" (p. 139), which is our primary theoretical lens. Crenshaw pointed out that to be well-intentioned in doing social justice work is insufficient: it is often the most well-meaning efforts that do the most damage (p. 139). She argued that it was a "problematic consequence of the tendency" to ignore intersectionality that perpetuated "a single-axis framework," which "is dominant in antidiscrimination [efforts]" (p. 139) and accomplishes exactly the opposite of social justice.

In an effort to fully appreciate the complexity of identities and issues that Jacob and his students brought to his course, we begin with a brief overview of Crenshaw's (1989) concept of "intersectionality", as it is the foundational philosophy behind her single-axis framework. Crenshaw (2004) coined the term "intersectionality" to refer to the intersections between people's identities and the various systems of oppressions and privileges that result from those identities. Crenshaw (1993) argued that it was impossible to, for example, discuss gender-based discrimination without acknowledging the simultaneous influences of "[r]ace, gender, and other identity categories" as interconnected and relevant (p. 1242).

Building on intersectionality, Crenshaw's (1989) single-axis framework considers the ways that many well-intentioned social justice advocates take both the multidimentionalities of identities and forms of discrimination and reduce those identities and social ills to "a single categorical axis" that emphasizes the identities of "otherwise-privileged members of the group" (p. 140). An example that Crenshaw (2015) gives, in a study focusing on Black girls' literacy in schools, is social justice work presumably done on behalf of that demographic. An intersectional, and therefore effective, approach would necessitate considering the ways that issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class are simultaneously relevant to Black girls' learning needs and school-based situations. However, a single-axis framework "erases Black women [and girls] in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination" by honing in on a single aspect of their identity and ignoring other relevant forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 2004, p. 140).

So, in the case of examining the ways that Black girls engage in literacies, Crenshaw (2015) argues that often the focus shifts solely to the single-axis of "girls," which elides racialized aspects of schooling and learning, or the single-axis becomes "Black students," which ignores the gendered aspects of those same experiences (pp. 19-21). Simultaneously, either mindset positions the more socially privileged population to become the representative group for all. So, though the initial effort might have been to support Black girls, Crenshaw's (2015) single-axis framework argues that "girls" nearly always shifts to an emphasis on white girls; "Black students" moves its attention to Black boys. In both instances, the intersectional identities and needs of Black girls are ignored, and interventions are less effective or even damaging as a result. In our own study, Crenshaw's (2015) concept was useful in guiding considerations of the ways that Jacob worked to implement a social justice pedagogy, and the ways that his own and his students' identities reinforced and/or challenged a single-axis framework.

Methodology

This paper is based on specific sections of an extensive data corpus that focused on the ways that faculty members' participation in this residential summer program influenced their teaching identities and instructional decisions. As a result of the research focus on faculty, nearly all data focus on the teachers rather than the students, though the students were an integral part of the instructors' participation in both the summer program and the research study. With 60 faculty invited to participate and all but 10 consenting to the study, there was no initial intent to center specifically on Jacob or any one of his colleagues. Rather, it was the uniqueness of Jacob's efforts, failures, and successes in relation to a social justice pedagogy that made prioritizing him specifically valuable both separate from and within the larger study.

In choosing to rely specifically on Jacob, we pulled all data that related directly to him for analysis. As a result, the methods informing this paper are ethnographic classroom observations, a focus group interview that included Jacob, and near-daily unstructured conversational interviews with Jacob over the course of the summer program. As the aim is to prioritize particularly on Jacob's efforts and reflections, in relation to the available data sources, we examine Jacob as a narrative-based descriptive case study (Yin, 2014), in an effort to provide "focused and detailed" data and discussions that consider Jacob both individually and within the context of his classroom and the summer program (Tobin, 2012, p. 2).

Ethnographic Observations

Stephanie chose to conduct ethnographic observations over the course of the overarching study because she wanted to observe actual teaching spaces; an additional benefit, given our later focus on Jacob, is that this approach is a common component of case study research (Stake, 1995), due to the method's ability to provide detailed data on a particular person, organization, or place (the "case") that is fully contextualized within the case's setting. For this research, Stephanie visited Jacob's classroom, during both iterations of the week-long "Social Justice Issues in the United States" course, twice each week. Each class session was 90 minutes long, and most observations were 45 minutes long, though a few were shorter or longer, depending on Stephanie's observation schedule for the day, the content of Jacob's class, modifications to Jacob's schedule by the department, and so on. During the observations, Stephanie took descriptive fieldnotes, which are written "descriptive accounts of experiences and observations [...] capturing as closely as possible [...] overheard talk and witnessed activities" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 5). Stephanie typed observational notes using an

electronic tablet during class, and then, as soon as there was opportunity, fleshed those notes out to be narrative accounts of classroom interactions.

Focus Group Interview

When designing the overarching research project, Stephanie and the participants discussed how the study might work. Consistently, participants asked for opportunities to talk about the program and their teaching practices with peer groups. As a result, Stephanie and the participants agreed that focus groups would be an integral part of the study.

Given this paper's purpose and methods, we would note that focus groups are a productive process for engaging in critical conversations on social justice issues, and for invoking narrative-based responses (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008). The critical work that focus groups make possible aligns well with this paper's theoretical framework, as the emphases are on social justice issues and teacher/student identities. Madriz (2000) argued that focus groups served as a means for "the advancement of an agenda of social justice" (p. 836) and that the shifting identities permitted in these exchanges allow for greater and "different dimensions of power" than standard interviews (p. 839).

In the third and fourth weeks of the summer program, Stephanie facilitated a total of six focus groups, one of which involved Jacob as a participant. Each focus group was semi-structured since, as noted earlier, the general research purpose related to faculty members' overall experiences in the summer program. Questions included asking about how the residential component of the program, such as physical proximity to peers and students, mattered to faculty's experiences, and how the program's de-emphasis of grades and testing influenced faculty's curricular decisions. As it was semi-structured, participants were able to discuss other topics about which Stephanie did not explicitly ask, which included Jacob exploring his experiences in his social justice course. And, because this paper is a case study of Jacob, only the focus group to which he contributed will be used in our analysis.

Conversational Interviews

Over the course of the summer, Stephanie engaged in unstructured conversational interviews with Jacob and other faculty while they were in the faculty dorm lobby, the dining hall, and other publicly accessible spaces. She used this approach rather than a more formal one because it allowed her to interact individually with participants without demanding more of their already limited time outside instruction, and made possible conducting individual interviews on a daily basis with most participants. Conversational interviewing, which interestingly began in survey-based research, emphasizes a non-standardized and unscripted interviewing approach (Lavrakas, 2008). It is focused on the interviewer and interviewee having the freedom to pursue various topics, ask for clarifications, and potentially deviate from research aims in order to produce an interaction that feels more informal and conversational than semi-structured or more formal interview approaches. Given the obvious intrusion of Stephanie in classroom spaces to collect fieldnotes and the structured nature of scheduled focus groups, the conversational interviews offered opportunities for follow-ups that were impossible in classrooms or in group settings. Additionally, they served as a form of member checking, in that Stephanie could clarify statements that Jacob and others had made, or ask for additional information or context for an event that she had observed.

Researcher Subjectivities

Directly linked to the data collection methods, and given our emphases on social justice and personal identities, it is relevant to discuss who we are, relative to the research and its analysis. Stephanie is currently a faculty member and researcher at a research-intensive university. She collected all data presented in this paper. As part of a larger research project, she had observed faculty in this summer program for three previous years, so she and most of the participants knew one another prior to this particular research project's start. She identifies as a White cisgender lesbian, and has worked and researched in secondary settings for approximately 15 years, including teaching literacy-based courses to high school students for 10 years. She and Jacob had known one another for four years prior to the start of this study, and their interactions had extended beyond the program to include meeting for coffee and attending social events together.

"How do Jacob's students' identities inform his instructional decisions in the course?"

Shelly is currently a doctoral student who takes courses with and writes with Stephanie. Before Shelly accessed any data, it had been anonymized, and in order to preserve participants' anonymity, Stephanie did not provide any information that was not either apparent in the data or provided in this paper to supply basic information about the program, Jacob, and his course. Her roles in relation to this manuscript were data analysis, co-authoring the paper, and making necessary revisions. Shelly is a White woman married to a man and is the mother of adult children. Prior to enrolling in a Ph.D. program, she had worked as a middle school English education teacher for one year and a high school English education teacher for two years. Her independent research projects include an emphasis on social justice in school settings, and so her experiences and personal research interests made her a valuable collaborator and co-author for this paper.

Participant Confidentiality and Member Checking

As noted earlier, there was care taken to ensure that Jacob and his colleagues' identities were protected throughout this process. As was explained to participants during the consent process, only Stephanie had access to any non-anonymized audio files and fieldnotes, which meant that she completed all transcriptions as well, and after the summer program ended, all data was secured in an IRB-approved encrypted university-based file storage system to which only Stephanie had access.

Additionally, as we stated in the section on conversational interviews, Stephanie used interactions with participants as both a data collection method and a form of member checking. This measure was to ensure both that Stephanie had understood participants' contributions as they had been intended and that participants were able to anonymize any elements of the study that they feared might compromise their or others' identities. There was additional member checking following the study, as Stephanie discussed and shared transcripts with participants to again ensure that the study included their feedback and protected them as much as was reasonably possible.

Data Analysis

The following research questions guided our analysis:

1) How does Jacob's personal identity inform his instructional decisions in a social justice issues course?

2) How do Jacob's students' identities inform his instructional decisions in the course?

Our intent in analyzing the data has been to attend "to the temporal and unfolding dimension of human experience" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16) by considering through the interviews and observation narratives the "content and meaning exhibited in the storied data" (p.22). We understood that Jacob's verbal responses and each classroom observation were fully contingent on specific contexts. As a result, we only permitted ourselves to excerpt from the interview transcripts and fieldnotes if the extracted text retained what we had interpreted to be the overall point of the whole narrative.

We were also informed by Butler-Kisber (2010), who discusses the value of "finding the story" in a narrative as a means of analyzing narrative responses (pp. 72-77). Using this method, we excluded information that, while advancing the Jacob's narratives, reiterated concepts made clear elsewhere in that particular narrative. In doing so, we were left with data excerpts that retained what we understood to be main points of our selected narratives while producing manageable sections for analysis.

After we had analyzed the narratives' structures for the "events and happenings that are crucial to [each of] the story[s'] denouement[s]" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16), we began to code to identify "aspects of the data as instances of" themes (p. 21). To code, we read and analyzed each data source individually first, considering possible themes based on the ways that Jacob's and students' identities and experiences, relative to the social justice course, were discussed or described. After this step, we conducted a cross-case analysis (Brooks, 2012; Mason, 2002) and compared and contrasted repeated concepts across the transcripts.

During our analysis, we used those notions that Jacob repeated without prompting across the data to establish codes that would permit us to organize our findings. Based on our methods' emphasis on Jacob and his narratives, we elected to make the codes in vivo, i.e., they were based directly on Jacob's responses. In considering our guiding research questions in relation to the data, we identified two major threads across the classroom observations, focus group, and conversational interviews: 1) Jacob's realization of the degrees to which his personal identity had shaped his course offering and 2) his later understanding that the students' diverse identities strengthened that course. In light of these findings, and drawing directly from Jacob's words, we established the codes, "I Made This a Gay Studies Course" and "Who They Are Is Making the Class Better" as ways to clearly organize our findings in relation to our research questions. The first code directly referenced to the first research question; the second code corresponded to the second question.

Findings

Jacob offered the course for the first time during the initial week of the summer program, and each time that he spoke with Stephanie during that timeframe, he expressed delight with both the content and outcomes of the course. As was his typical practice on the final class day, Jacob invited students to give him feedback on the course before he reoffered it. It was during this time that Jacob began to recognize the ways that a course purporting to be about social justice had had severe limitations. The first code examines Jacob's recognition of those limitations, and of the ways that his personal identities strongly influenced the course's content and shortcomings; the second code considers the effects of adjustments Jacob made following students' feedback.

"I Made This a Gay Studies Course"

Standing at the copy machine after the first day of the course, Jacob had excitedly told Stephanie, "You really need to get by the classroom when you can stay a while! The class is going great! I think that some of the stuff we're reading about is stuff that they didn't even know was possible in education. You're gonna love it when you come." Though Stephanie informally visited Jacob's classroom every day, usually for 10-minute segments, the overarching research focus and her schedule permitted her to observe Jacob's class for its duration for the first time on the third day of the six-day course. Her fieldnote narrative captured the setting and the course content:

> There are 16 students in the class, and they and Jacob have their desks arranged in the middle of the room in a circle. Despite it being over 95 degrees outside, most are swathed in blankets and sweatshirts to counter the frigid air conditioning of the classroom. Nine of the students are male, and seven are female. There is evident racial and ethnic diversity among the students. Four of the seven female students are young women of color, and one wears a hijab. One of the white female students has braces propped against a neighboring desk, which I have seen her use to navigate campus over the past few days. Most of the male students are white, one is Black, one is Indian, and one is Latino. [Stephanie's notes on classroom demographics are based on a discussion with Jacob about students' self-asserted identities, as his department collected that information during their first evening meeting with their students; additionally, students were invited to introduce themselves at the start of each class, in case initial self-descriptions needed to be edited. Stephanie amended her fieldnotes to reflect this information, rather than leave student descriptions based on her observational assumptions.] Students flip through the pages of a reading handout that they were assigned for homework. Jacob sits in the desk nearest the front of the room and asks the students, "What did you think about this reading for today? Where do you want to start?" There is a short pause after his question, as students shift in their desks and wait on someone to respond. Finally, one of the White male students says, "Well, I mean, we've read about the fight for gay rights for a couple of days now, and I thought that this author's perspective was pretty biased." Jacob nods and says, "Okay, good! What about it was biased? How did it connect with your other readings or the video that we watched a clip of on the first day [an excerpt of a documentary on homeless gay youth]? How did it deal with this particular issue of social justice?" Students again shift and look around at one another as if to see who will speak this time. The young woman in the hijab responds, "It may just be that we've been dealing with this topic a lot, but I didn't think that his [the author's] argument was really anything new. Just more of the same." Several students nod in agreement. Jacob seems to weigh her comment and then says, "Okay—let's focus on that—on the connections between the different readings. Get out your other readings and find a partner. Start to figure out the overlaps and differences, and why

"Finally, one of the White male students says, 'Well, I mean, we've read about the fight for gay rights for a couple of days now, and I thought that this author's perspective was pretty biased.'"

> those similarities or differences are important in relation to this social justice issue." Students begin to shuffle to pull earlier readings out and several stand up to move closer to a partner.

As we, the authors, read through the data for coding purposes, what was noteworthy about this particular observation was the mismatch between Jacob's enthusiastic insistence that Stephanie plan for a lengthy classroom visit and the students' seeming lethargy in relation to the discussion when she got there.

During the lunch period following the class, Jacob found Stephanie in the cafeteria and asked, "What did you think when you stopped by today?"

Stephanie hesitated, confused by the seeming disconnect, but then replied, "I noticed that there seemed to be a lot of hesitation when you ask them a question. Why do you think that is?"

Jacob nodded vigorously. "Yes, I think it's because they're completely out of their depths here. They've never considered these topics in an academic setting before."

Stephanie nodded without responding.

Jacob continued, "Day after tomorrow, I'm going to get their feedback. We're gonna go over the course, the readings, what suggestions they have for when I offer it again later this summer."

Surprised, given the observation, Stephanie asked, "You're reoffering it? So, it's gone well overall?"

Jacob laughed. "I'm definitely reoffering it—this has been one of my strongest classes ever. And, the best thing is that it's about social justice, not more basic school crap that they'd get at home."

Interestingly, Jacob's assertion that the value of his course lay in its deviation from standard high school curricula, rather than directly linking to students and their responses, is one that echoes back to much of the literature on social justice teaching. We noted earlier that, given our emphasis on identities in relation to social justice pedagogy, we did not have a substantial body of research from which to draw; there is, however, extensive discussions that center the value of curricula. In sampling the thousands of papers on the topic, we found that a common thread is for the authors—much like Jacob—to advocate for curricular approaches without thorough considerations of the ways that teachers' and students' personal positions might affect such efforts. We borrow from some of these discussions to better examine Jacob's actions in his classroom.

Kumasi and Manlove (2015) emphasized the need for what they term a "core curriculum and essential knowledge" in social justice teaching (p. 415). Their argument, a noble one intended to incorporate diversity into teaching and research, problematically rests on the notion that their proposed areas of emphasis should be treated as universal concepts of social justice, broadly applied across learners and contexts. Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble (2016) similarly frame social justice teaching as a widely applicable "tool" that will enable wide swaths of students to "learn the basics necessary" for thoughtful consideration of social justice topics, such as "race, class, sexuality, and gender" (p. 107). Related, Lawton (2017) discuss "incorporate[ing] [institutions' and instructors'] social justice values into the curriculum" as a means of "shap[ing] the social justice morality" of students, given that such approaches are so rare in schools (p. 813). Without consciously drawing from this tendency to position social justice teaching as a "one size fits all," or at least "most," Jacob understood the strength of his class to rest in the power of his materials.

He was unaware that students seemed uncertain and possibly disengaged. After all, one student had described an assigned article with, "It may just be that we've been dealing with this topic a lot, but I didn't think that his [the author's] argument was really anything new. Just more of the same." The comment simultaneously indicated a fatigue with the particular topic and a dismissal of the reading as offering nothing new. Despite potential red flags, even as a veteran teacher, Jacob saw no causes for concern when asked about the students' disengagement during class. Instead, he re-conceptualized their critiques and hesitant participation with the explanation, "They've never considered these topics in an academic setting before." In doing so, the course content became the primary spotlight of the class, rather than the students' interactions with or understandings of those concepts.

Students' Critiques of the Curriculum.

Two days later Stephanie again sat in Jacob's classroom for an extended observation as he told the students, "I'm planning on reoffering this class in a couple of weeks to a new crop of students. What suggestions do you have about what to keep, toss, or add?"

There was no hesitation this time. Immediately, nearly every student raised their hand. One student told Jacob, "All we read was about gay rights."

Another student pointed out, "Yeah, but even if it was gonna be a class about gay rights, fine. But change the class name and make it more diverse. Like, it wasn't just gay rights—it was a bunch of white gay guys the whole week."

One young woman asked, "If we were going to focus on gay rights, why weren't there any women? Any lesbians? Any queer women?"

By the end of class, it was clear that Jacob had not expected this response to the class, given his dazed expression, though he unwaveringly recorded every student's response in his notepad.

When it was time to dismiss class, Jacob told them, "Thank you for your honesty and suggestions. You've given me a lot to think about."

During the next conversational interview that Jacob and Stephanie had, he laughingly asked, "So, did you enjoy watching them tell me it was a terrible class?"

Stephanie, however, replied, "I was impressed with how well you'd built a community where they were comfortable being so honest with you. What are you going to do about when you reoffer it, based on their feedback?"

Jacob stood thoughtfully for a moment and said, "You know, they were right. It was supposed to be a class about social justice issues in the U.S. and I made this a gay studies course. I wrote down a lot of the people and books they suggested, so I've got a few weeks to check them out. You'll have to come back when I reteach the class to see if I've learned anything new."

A major point of consideration in this paper is the ways that Jacob's personal identity informed his instructional decisions. When providing the context earlier, we intentionally omitted the fact that Jacob openly identified as a gay man, and often wore t-shirts that related to gay rights issues, such as a rainbow-colored U.S. flag. We did not leave this information until now to be subversive, nor was the decision to do so careless; instead, we hope to emphasize that while this component of Jacob's identity was an integral part of who he was and how he designed the course, its influence on his teaching was as invisible to him as it was to this paper's readers until the course concluded. Similar to much of the related literature, Jacob framed the course as

being one that would push students to consider social justice issues anew—the curriculum was, in effect, a tool that would push all of his students to think in new and critical ways.

As a result, this moment of student feedback was invaluable to Jacob, the students, the class, and this research, not only because it gave Jacob essential unfiltered feedback, but because it countered Jacob's stance that the value of the course lay in students' unfamiliarity with the concepts. Students' responses, in fact, indicated no discomfort in the ideas that the course offered. Certainly, it is likely that these readings and topics were new to many students, but there were no expressions of uneasiness. Rather, students seemed willing to engage with the LGBTQ topics, if those concepts were intersectional: "If we were going to focus on gay rights, why weren't there any women? Any lesbians? Any queer women?"

"'If we were going to focus on gay rights, why weren't there any women? Any lesbians? Any queer women?'"

Students' responses emphasized that Jacob's identity was much more complex and influential than he had credited, and that theirs should matter more. Certainly, Jacob had, drawing on Crenshaw's (1989) theoretical concept of a single-axis framework, intended to promote social justice, and he had offered the course with only the best intentions to do so. But, in unintentionally structuring the course so that "social justice" became synonymous with "gay rights," he severely limited his and the students' abilities to explore other forms of inequality. Perhaps even more notably in adopting a single-axis framework, students pointed out that the key issue for many of them was not the emphasis on gay rights; the concern was that the issue had been presented as one that involved, as one student put it, "a bunch of white gay guys the whole week." Students had wondered about representations of women, people of color, trans and queer identities. Jacob's realization that he had made the class "about gay rights" was an acknowledgement that he had made the course about him and people who looked like him—white gay men. In doing so, he had erased students' identities and centered his, thereby silencing them until the moment that he explicitly asked for their responses.

"Who They Are is Making the Class Better"

Jacob reoffered the course in the fourth week of the program, and often when Stephanie saw him over the courses of Weeks 2 and 3 in the faculty workroom or the library, he told her, "I'm still revamping that social justice class!" It was with great anticipation for both Jacob and Stephanie, then, that the new version began. Stephanie could not attend on the first day, given that the overarching research project involved observing dozens of faculty located across a large college campus, but she attended as early and often as possible. As before, she managed to stop by nearly every day for about 15 minutes, but her first full-class-period observation of the renovated course was on the third day of six. When she began to take fieldnotes, it was clear that there had been significant changes:

> Students are again seated in a circle, and the class make-up is still noticeably diverse, in terms of students' presumed gender, racial, and ethnic identities, as well as several students' gender expressions. They all face forward to watch the ten-minute video clip that Jacob is playing. The film's narrator discusses the impact that migrant workers have on the U.S. food supply and economy, and the implications of deporting immigrants for the nation. Several students

scribble notes on paper and one uses a laptop to type a bullet list of notes on the clip. When the film ends, Jacob flips the lights on. Students squint and shade their eyes as they readjust to the brightened room, and several shift in their desks so that they're facing the others rather than the projector screen.

Jacob begins, "You had a couple of readings last night about the deportation of undocumented workers, one strongly in favor of deportation, and one against. Now you've seen this documentary excerpt. Given our current presidential administration, this is a hot topic in terms of social justice. Rather than you share your positions right off the bat, what I want to talk about is what parts of the course materials offered arguments or perspectives that you hadn't thought about before?"

Several students immediately raise their hands and one begins, "I'm gonna be real—like, I don't want to default to this stereotype that all undocumented immigrants work in farming, because I know that's not true, but I did not realize how much of an economic impact migrant farm workers had in America."

Another student nods and lowers her hand, "Yes, I agree. My parents are hardcore Trump supporters, and I'm not gonna lie—I was, too. Like, that's what I live around, so that's what I know. But reading that one article about a brother being separated from his family and sent back to a country he didn't even remember? For real, I was crying when I read that."

The most obvious shift in the course was that the content had significantly changed. Before, students had noted that they had read only gay rights-related materials; this time, students were tackling the complex topic of immigration. Jacob had noted in a conversational interview later on the same day that he had included this topic because "Several students told me that it mattered to them, to their communities, and a few others because they just wanted to know more on such a major topic." In shifting the curriculum to better acknowledge both students' personal experiences and the current sociopolitical climate in which they and Jacob were learning, the new approach encouraged strong intersectionality. In just the brief provided snippet, students noted economic impacts, racial and ethnic stereotypes, political leaders' positions, and the human element of a major social justice topic. In short, in working to make the course more reflective of more students, Jacob's class had inevitably shifted from a single-axis to a far more productive multifaceted approach.

Students as the key to social justice teaching. The evening following this class observation, Jacob joined five other faculty members for a focus group. Stephanie asked them, "What influences your teaching? How do you inform one another's practices? How do the students shape your decisions?" Jacob laughed and told the group,

> I'm gonna answer this first because I have had a—what do you call it?—an epiphany this summer. I taught this class that Stephanie saw in Week 1 on social justice topics in the U.S., and I thought that it was amazing. Until I asked the kids for feedback, that is. They handed me my ass. Told me all the ways that I'd basically made a social justice class anti-justice. But, I listened to what they had to say that first time I taught it, and I worked really hard to make the class

> more diverse and more based on their experiences, rather than my own. I even chased some of them down in the cafeteria, and cornered some of you [gesturing to his peers in the focus group, who nod and smile] to ask about resources that I could use. And, this time who the kids are matters in the class.
>
> And, you know what? Who they are is making the class better. Topics that I'm just embarrassed that I left out the first time are front-and-center this time. We've addressed sexual assault, undocumented immigrants, poverty, drug use—and you know what every single one of those topics have in common, besides obviously being social justice issues? They're issues that don't affect me but do affect some of these kids. And, now that those topics are there, this is a much, much better class.

Jacob's peers congratulated him on his shifts and realizations, and other participants took up his thread of the ways that student identities mattered in their own teaching practices.

Jacob's response in the focus group echoes back to our single-axis framework. Jacob noted to his peers that the students had "[t]old me all the ways that I'd basically made a social justice class anti-justice." Crenshaw (1989) points out, as a primary element of the single-axis concept, that such an approach is often taken up by those who intend to advance social justice. Jacob had certainly intended to do good through his pedagogy and curriculum. However, he realized that instead he had severely limited the potential for actual, intersectional social justice by centering his own experiences and understandings as the basis for his instruction.

The shift, or "epiphany" as Jacob described it, was a result of his decision to invite—and then act on—student feedback: "I listened to what they had to say that first time I taught it, and I worked really hard to make the class more diverse and more based on their experiences." As noted earlier, literature on social justice pedagogies often frames veteran teachers such as Jacob as having little to learn, which contrasts with accompanying literature demonstrating how valuable students' identities are to social justice education. In this instance, Jacob simultaneously challenged and supported prevailing arguments in social justice research. Students' perspectives are indeed critical to teaching social justice critically, responsibly, and intersectionally; however, teachers' identities, in this case a veteran teacher and his peers', mattered a great deal, too. He had gone to extra lengths to seek out several of the very students who had criticized his course, as well as some colleagues, to improve the class and to achieve his goal of having a course that truly centered social justice as its core. He pointed out to the focus group that this shift was because the course now included "issues that don't affect me but do affect some of these kids." In shifting the single-axis approach that he had unintentionally adopted in the first iteration of the class to an intersectional effort incorporating students' identities and suggestions, the class was markedly stronger and more meaningful for Jacob and the students.

Limitations and Discussion

We recognize a range of limitations in this research, even as we propose ways that it matters beyond this paper. First, because Jacob was not the main concentration of the overarching research project, Stephanie did not visit his classroom as much as she undoubtedly would have had he been the focus from the start. While there are limited classroom observations, we do believe, though, that our findings are trustworthy given the various data

collection methods, as well as member checking. But in asserting trustworthiness, it is possible that our findings would have been different had more attention and time been centered on Jacob.

Additionally, as a case study, Jacob's experiences and context are unique, and not only because we honed in on a single participant. Faculty members in this summer program refer to it as "Shangri La," because it is a space the eliminates the pressures of grading and testing mandates, and allows them to craft their own curricula based on interests and needs. It is unique in the contemporary field of education because it values intellectual freedom and creativity. Perhaps more researchers' attention to the possibilities afforded when instructional spaces trust and empower teachers such as Jacob might help to shift current emphases away from standardization and constant oversight.

Student Identities and the Potential for Social Justice

The constant refrain of "social justice" across educational research is a valuable and necessary one, but one that needs to more attentively consider the ways that teachers' identities, both personal and professional, matter in social justice efforts. Jacob's overall instructional aim, across all of his courses and department, had been to promote students' cultural literacies, fostering "an awareness of and sensitivity to diverse cultures and lifestyles" (Hernandez, 2016, p. 20). Discussions of these forms of literacy are inseparable from social justice topics such as those that Jacob aimed to explore through his class.

Teacher research would suggest that implementations of these sorts of approaches are a matter of curricular access and teaching experience. After all, most veteran teachers in the literature are positioned as mentors whose pedagogies and techniques might benefit others. However, Jacob's efforts are a crucial reminder of the ways that personal identities may come into conflict with professional ones. Certainly, Jacob was a socially conscious person and educator, and he intended to advance social justice issues in a range of ways through his new course. However, in reflecting on our first research question, Jacob's identities became not just an influence but the very basis of his course. The unintended consequence was a problematic single-axis approach to social justice. Jacob simultaneously limited what he and students could explore and inadvertently erased representations of many of his students from the curriculum, while centering his own positionalities as the curriculum. An ironic and undesired result in a social justice class.

"Jacob simultaneously limited what he and students could explore and inadvertently erased representations of many of his students from the curriculum, while centering his own positionalities as the curriculum."

In considering the ways that others might continue this line of research or integrate notions from this paper into their classrooms, a key point of consideration is that it was Jacob's attention to student feedback that helped to support a more intersectional course. This raises two essential areas to consider, one related to Jacob and a second to his students. First, Jacob's shift was a direct result of his willingness to take the time to ask students for their reactions and feedback. And perhaps even more significantly, to take their feedback seriously. Not only had he jotted down notes as they had talked, but he had sought out resources that they had recommended, and he had continued communicating with many of those students and some faculty members in his efforts to

improve the course. He had done serious work to honor their concerns and feedback, and in doing so had made the class better for him and them.

Second, given the limited amount of scholarship on students' identities in relation to social justice curricula, including in this paper, Jacob's realization that students' identities and perspectives were the key factor in both shifting power in his course and fostering better intersectionality is valuable. Recent political developments in the U.S. related to the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and gun control have reminded its citizens of the power of students' voices and influence (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Bump, 2018; Donnelly-Smith, 2018). The same reformative power is possible in classroom spaces, too. Too many studies consider students' roles in social justice work in terms of curricular effectiveness, that is how well a particular approach worked on or for them, rather than how students' identities might actually overhaul curricula in powerful ways.

For practicing teachers who are confined within the limitations of the current political forces shaping education, a reasonable step in working to enact social justice pedagogies is to follow Jacob's example and work to recognize and honor students' identities within curricula as often and thoughtfully as possible.

Even a seasoned veteran such as Jacob benefitted from carving spaces out for students, and then actively learning from them in ways that indelibly changed his teaching. The same could happen in other classrooms and potentially shift education in the same powerful ways that students continue to shape equally vital aspects of U.S. culture and society.

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