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I've Got You Covered: Adventures in Social Justice-Informed Co-Teaching

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Abstract: What is social justice-informed co-teaching? Why is it important? How can social justice pedagogy deepen co-teaching practices? What are the key challenges and possibilities open to teachers and learners involved in a social-justice informed co-teaching experience? These questions are useful to ask as they begin to address new pedagogical approaches in teacher education, which engage with the current diverse student population. Each of these questions is discussed in this qualitative research paper. This narrative inquiry adds to the literature on social justice-informed co-teaching in an innovative way. It also critically examines the purposeful endeavor of two professors who used a social justice framework to guide their co-teaching practice and pedagogy. At once, this paper is a lived experience, a story, and a research study. In deconstructing two narratives, the authors articulate outcomes and implications of social justice informed co-teaching practice and pedagogy. Further implications for research and practice in teacher education programs, teaching practices and field experiences, and co-teachers themselves are shared in the closing segment of the paper.

Keywords: social justice, co-teaching, teacher education, equity

Introduction

Co-Teaching

In a broad way, co-teaching can be defined as: "two or more teachers working together in the same classroom sharing responsibility for the student learning" (Badiali & Titus, 2010, p. 74). The practice of co-teaching has been the subject of much attention from researchers over the past few decades (Solis et al., 2012). While co-teaching has been conceptualized in a variety of ways, a common definition draws from a well-known six-dimensional framework (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 2011; Friend & Cook, 2000). Writing on co-teaching since the early 1990s, researchers have proposed that co-teaching draws from six core collaborative practices including: *mentor modeling* (one teach, one observe), *one teach, one assist* (one teach, one drift), *station teaching* (teachers monitor as students move through learning stations), *parallel teaching* (co-teachers teach the same content to split groups), *alternative teaching* (teachers deliver different content to support varied learning needs), *synchronous teaming* (educators collaboratively teach simultaneously) (Badiali & Titus, 2010; Conderman, 2011). Yet co-teaching is much more than the act of collaboratively facilitating learning experiences. To deepen and clarify our understanding of co-teaching, in the following section the authors elaborate on what is holistic co-teaching; to which then they bring a framework of social justice pedagogy.

Holistic Co-Teaching

A fuller form of co-teaching involves ongoing collaboration in developing engaging learning experiences and assessments, facilitating them, and then reflecting on and assessing them afterwards through critical dialogue (Enfield & Stasz, 2011). Researchers who favor this extended vision of co-teaching – what the authors call *holistic co-teaching* – include Badiali and Titus (2010), Condorman (2011), and Embury and Kroeger (2012). Some of the key challenges to holistic co-teaching include: finding time to plan and dialogue, balancing power dynamics in the relationship, establishing and balancing roles, and negotiating differences in personality and teaching style (Sharma & Cobb, in press). With this understanding of holistic co-teaching, while recognizing the challenges and the possibilities it brings, the authors aim to look at co-teaching through a social justice informed framework. The authors contend that social justice informed co-teaching practice and pedagogy provide a new perspective to students and educators who are immersed in the process of it. In the next section of this paper, the authors explain their conceptualization of social justice informed pedagogy, which they bridge with holistic co-teaching.

Social Justice-Informed Pedagogy

The authors draw on Kohli's (2005) concept of social justice in the context of education which encourages "[b]roadening the concept of social justice to include multi-cultural meanings, identities and differential power/privilege, [which] affects our understandings of politics and political change" (p. 100). She explains how understanding the political nature of social institutions, such as schools and universities, is a primary goal for social justice, which allows students and educators to decipher what is just and unjust according to their context and challenge it respectively (Kohli, 2005). As a result, with this understanding of social justice, the authors believe it can be applied to a pedagogical approach, which informs and inspires spaces of change and transformation in schools. The authors contend that social justice informed learning experiences are needed to help students develop their critical awareness and support their ethical approach to partaking in social action and change.

Because agency and engagement are intrinsic to social justice learning, they require consistent, purposeful work. In activist Paulo Freire's view, students need to be engaged in consciousness-raising problem solving, which can be found rampantly in contemporary social issues within education (2000). "The task of the dialogical teacher," according to Freire, is to "re-present" the world "as a problem" (2000, p. 109). Here, teachers converse and work alongside students as active members of a learning community. Thus, the authors hold that learners need to develop a sense of justice and ethics, learners need to support justice in their social interactions, and learners need to challenge individual and systemic forms of injustice. Using this social justice informed lens, the authors encourage dialogue with and between learners, facilitate problem posing experiences, foster equity-oriented awareness and social action, address power issues in schools and society, and explore the emotional and moral dimension of teaching and learning. This multi-dimensional vision of social awareness – where one's perspective of the world, the relationships within the world from different perspectives, and their own

role within the world – captures how the authors envision social justice-informed pedagogy.

Holistic Co-Teaching with Social Justice-Informed Pedagogy

In recent years, a growing number of researchers have articulated – and indeed called for – a form of co-teaching that is at once holistic and rooted in social justice learning. Ball (2009), for instance, argued that co-teaching is essential to teacher education, and preparing people to differentiate their pedagogy to learners with a wide range of needs. Similarly, Mensah (2011) recommended that by designing co-teaching experiences with the aim of raising critical consciousness, teacher candidates can better develop their understanding of a culturally responsive pedagogy. On one level, because a co-teaching dynamic brings more viewpoints into the teacher's role, it enriches the possibility of divergent thinking and dialogue in learning spaces (Bangou & Austin, 2011). On a logistical level, having an additional teacher in the classroom can allow for more 1-1 and small group conferencing when exploring social justice topics and issues (i.e., through case study activities and debates). Moreover, having two teachers working together creates more possibilities for different learning practices (i.e., the six above-listed co-teaching approaches).

By having co-teachers dialoguing before and after lessons, *about* those lessons, opens windows for the possibility of constructive self- and partner feedback within a reflective practice that is rooted in social justice thinking (Ball, 2009; Mensah, 2011). Co-teaching offers two different entry points into dialogue as well, as it breaks down the common classroom system of one authority, plays with that power dynamic, thus challenging traditional modes of teaching. Yet while the attention devoted to social justice learning and co-teaching is growing, the majority of studies do not delve deeply into the intersection of the two practices (Sharma & Cobb, in press). In conducting a systematic literature review on current research on social justice-informed co-teaching, the authors noted that most research that self identifies as being rooted in social justice-oriented co-teaching presents a cursory vision of social justice pedagogy (Sharma & Cobb, in press). A number of researchers, for instance, outline ways in which differentiated support can be achieved more directly (and fully) within a co-teaching framework (Ball, 2009; Goodnough et al., 2009; Nichols et al., 2010).

While the authors appreciate the care and attention these researchers have devoted to fostering differentiated learning and taking on issues of ableism, such an approach does not necessarily consider additional social issues of inequity, such as sexism and racism. As the authors have noted, there is a gap in the literature on holistic co-teaching for rich learning experiences firmly rooted in social justice awareness and social action (Sharma & Cobb, in press). Because co-teaching represents a useful way of practicing social justice pedagogy, it is important this gap is addressed in educational research and teaching practice. This study aims to address this gap. Drawing from the idiomatic expression, *I've got you covered*, the title of this paper highlights the supportive nature of social justice-informed co-teaching.

Background

Contemporary Issues in Education Course

The authors rooted this critical qualitative inquiry in their experience co-teaching the first semester of a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) course in the University of Windsor's Faculty of Education and Academic Development. The B.Ed. program at Windsor included a number of compulsory and elective courses as well as enrichment course options. One compulsory course for all students was entitled: *Contemporary Issues in Education*. According to the B.Ed. course calendar the issues course provides: "[a]n introduction to critical reflection and analysis of educational issues. This course addresses the varieties of students who enter the classroom in terms of their diverse social origins, cultures, identities, and social status (lived and perceived)" (UW, 2014). Moreover, the course "engages participants in an examination of the purposes of education, education policy, and teaches a responsibility to work productively with school colleagues and other adults to achieve equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for all students" (UW, 2014).

While teaching the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course, the authors worked with a group of approximately 40 learners, most of whom were young adults in their early- to mid-twenties. These students were enrolled in the intermediate/senior division of the B.Ed. program, preparing to teach in Ontario classrooms ranging from Grade 7 to 12. While students had a variety of teachable subjects (such as science and music), the course itself aimed to support their equitable approach in any Ontario classroom—whether it be a specific grade level or subject area. Running at 16 lessons, the course extended from September 2014 to April 2015, with the first semester running from September to December 2014. Lesson clusters were broken by periods that the students went out on practicum. Students in the course attended a 60-minute lesson once a week throughout the school year.

The Unit-Planning Project

A unit-planning project rests at the heart of the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course the authors co-taught. The project was crafted to provide learners with a reflective and purposeful social justice theory-into-practice experience. In this group assignment students worked collaboratively in small groups (of 4-6) to develop a detailed unit plan. The project included five components, namely: *context*, *learning outcomes and assessment*, *plan for differentiation*, *lesson-by-lesson overview*, and *opening lesson plan*. Students in the course were initially introduced to the parameters of the project during the first and third lessons through PowerPoints and class discussions led by the co-teachers—alternating between the *one teach, one assist* model and the *one teach, one observe* model (Conderman, 2011).

As the course unfolded, approximately half of class time was devoted to working directly on the project through scaffolded activities that led students through a process of collaboratively drafting each of the project five components. To facilitate ongoing and guided teacher and peer feedback, the authors circulated the classroom during lessons and conferenced with groups to provide clarifications, guidance, and encouragement. On

occasion, the authors collected each group's draft of a component and provided constructive feedback the following week. The four learning outcomes of the project were as follows: (1) *respond to different needs, perspectives, and issues in school communities through teaching practice*, (2) *challenge personal and systemic views when responding to different needs and perspectives in school communities*, (3) *collaborate with colleagues to professionally and respectfully discuss and respond to equity issues faced by school communities*, and (4) *ask the students to justify informed choices made in regard to equity issues faced by school communities*.

Case Study Learning

As the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course unfolded, the authors also guided the class through a variety of case study activities—seven in all. Each case study presented students with a scenario where challenges associated with equity and power arose in relation to the actions of teachers, students, parents, and/or school principals. The seven case studies were all taken from the course text, entitled: *What to Do? Case Studies for Educators* (Hare & Portelli, 2003).

By having learners discuss issues of power and equity from a variety of stakeholders' perspectives the case study activities indirectly lead into the unit-planning project. More specifically, the authors had students discuss the importance of understanding context and providing rich, differentiated learning experiences and interactions. Moreover, the case study activities provided varied opportunities for the authors to observe the interactions and participation of learners, and conduct diagnostic and formative assessment along the way. Ultimately, these case studies were utilized to engage learners in problem posing experiences, as they collaboratively addressed a variety of challenging scenarios (Freire, 2000). These activities presented opportunities for teachers and learners to engage in courageous conversations centered on empowerment and culturally responsive dialogue, in both a small group and whole class dynamic.

Method

This paper analyzes findings from a critical qualitative inquiry conducted in a mid-sized Canadian university in the fall of 2014. In teaching an undergraduate B.Ed. course, the authors engaged in social justice-informed co-teaching. They map out an approach to holistic co-teaching that is rooted in social justice awareness, reflection, pedagogical practice, and social action—also known as praxis (Freire, 2000). In outlining the methodological details of the study, this segment has been organized into the following five subsections: *Research Question*, *Setting*, *Participants*, *Data Collection*, and *Data Coding and Analysis*.

Research Question

While co-teaching and social justice-informed pedagogy separately have much to offer teachers and learners alike it is unclear as to how blending the two might enrich both practices. Consequently, in conducting this qualitative inquiry the authors have

consistently returned to the following question: *Why pursue social justice-informed co-teaching?* To address this question, they reconstructed and then deconstructed their own teaching-learning experiences. As such, their findings "do not appeal to pure reason or statistical logic but rather are derived from pure lived experience" (Lincoln, 2010, p. 6).

Setting

The authors have based this study on their own experiences in co-teaching the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course. As researchers and practitioners, they conducted a narrative inquiry while engaging in social justice praxis. The process began in summer of 2014, when the authors met to develop the learning outcomes, assignments, lesson sequence, and readings of the course. Each author had taught the course previously (albeit separately) and in dialoguing to craft a new syllabus, both had a lot to say. In these initial conversations they both agreed to develop a course that included a central unit plan project with lessons designed to directly and indirectly prepare students for this project. They also decided to use a variety of case studies to indirectly provide students with opportunities to engage in problem posing learning, collaborative learning, and courageous conversations. While teaching the course, the authors met between lessons to debrief the previous lesson, plan activities, and determine the roles each would take on in the following lesson. It is within this setting that the authors conducted this narrative inquiry.

Participants

This study draws from the experiences and perceptions of two professors. Both have taught internationally and both have also taught with a large school board in Southern Ontario. The authors have worked in the area of social justice throughout their careers as they have taken on a variety of roles, including teacher, school leader, committee chair, and researcher. In conducting this study, the authors critically reflected on their own experiences in co-teaching the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course to a group of approximately 40 teacher candidates. During the fall semester, they individually and collectively archived and analyzed their experiences, drawing from McCormack's practice of *restorying stories* (2004).

Data Collection

As participants in this study, the authors drew from the research practice of narrative inquiry as they developed and gathered data. To provide a close reading (and tighter focus) of their co-teaching experience with the *Contemporary Issues in Education* class, the authors have focused this study on the fall term (and first eight lessons) of the school year, running from September to December 2014. Throughout the fall, the authors separately kept a journal of their experiences in teaching the course. They recorded their thoughts on how they felt lessons unfolded based on student participation as well as work students submitted as a part of the in-class assignments. Both authors also indicated how and why they made modifications to lesson plans after overseeing the lessons themselves. In recording their impressions on their own teaching practices, the authors kept anecdotal

notes on how actively students engaged in group discussions and critical thinking activities throughout the semester. These reflective journals and notes represent the raw data utilized in this study.

Data Coding and Analysis

Narrative inquiry involves a process of re/constructing lived experiences to form and share personal stories—and then reading those stories to make meaning of the experiences, as well as the world itself (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). Key steps in the process of *restorying stories* include *active listening*, *locating narrative processes*, and *drafting and analyzing the story* (McCormack, 2004).

In the late fall of 2014, the authors shared their journals and lesson notes with one another. They not only read one another's journals and notes but they also conversed with one another about them. Examining these data led the authors to identify recurring keywords and emergent themes. Keywords that arose in the data include: trust, feedback, responsive pedagogy, and dialogue. Two key themes that emerged in the data include: *Critical Feedback Loop* and *Learning the Learners*. This stage represents the *active listening* component of the data coding and analysis process.

With the two above-mentioned core themes in mind, the authors identified two key teachable moments in their data that spoke to each theme. After identifying these learning moments, the authors discussed their own perspectives of each experience. Working collaboratively, they co-constructed narrative vignettes that expressed their impression of each key moment. These narrative vignettes illuminated important dimensions of the authors' social justice-informed co-teaching approach, and they form the core of this study's data and findings. Rooted in narrative inquiry, this dialogic dimension of the study represents two stages of the research process—namely *locating narrative processes* and *drafting and analyzing the story*. The two narratives developed for this paper – as well as the authors' deconstruction of them – critically discuss how co-teaching, in a variety of ways, presents exceptional opportunities for social justice learning.

Findings

In this segment, the authors share two stories based on their experiences co-teaching the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course. They consider what these narratives tell us about the possibilities and challenges that stem from social justice-informed co-teaching. Each narrative is followed by a discussion where the authors reflect on their experiences and consider what they mean for the theory and practice of social justice-informed co-teaching. Specifically, they use each story as an opportunity for a shared discussed that illuminates a particular theme associated with social justice-focused co-teaching practice. Throughout these findings, the authors' narratives and reflections revisit the central research question of this paper, namely: *Why pursue social justice-informed co-teaching?*

Both narratives are told in the first person, with the initial narrative being told by Cam and the second narrative being told by Manu. When taken together, these vignettes

both highlight the supportive and creative possibilities that co-teaching allows. As one co-teacher may say to another while teaching for social justice: "*I've got you covered*."

Critical Feedback Loop (Cam's Narrative)

On Tuesday September 23 2014 we co-taught our third lesson of the school year. In the course schedule we had set aside this lesson to focus on preparing the class for the unit-planning assignment, which was set up to run through the entire school year. We had planned on going over the core aims of the project as well as its five key components during the lesson. We had also planned on outlining the social justice dimension of the assignment as well as the rationale for the project's overall design and aim. During the previous week we decided that I would lead the activity and lesson, with Manu providing ongoing support (i.e., by posing additional questions and adding supplementary to elaborate on, or clarify key points). In this way, the third lesson would make use of the one teach, one observe and the one teach, one observe co-teaching approaches (Conderman, 2011).

Our rationale for the method and content we have selected for this lesson is twofold. First, we want to ensure that students have ample time to consider the project. Second, we value the time and forum of dialoguing about class assignments interactively in a whole class dynamic. We also believe that it is important to use some class time to provide students with guided opportunities to critically think about social justice values and perspectives within course assignments. This facilitation we believe is necessary for encouraging small group social justice-informed dialogue, teambuilding and whole class interaction.

As such, I led the conversation as groups examined and spoke about the various components of the project. First off, Cam defined one aspect of social justice pedagogy as responsive. He explained that the project requires students/groups to outline a school-classroom context as well as a social issue within that context. Cam explained that the way the group addresses the issue in their unit plan would indicate how they are able to identify issues and then address them in their teaching practice.

Power-point slides were used to pose questions to the class and get the groups talking about the project, and then sharing their thoughts and responses with the class. Students actively participated in this lesson, sharing their ideas on the benefits of, and rationale for, the project. As educators, we were pleased that students actively participated in class discussion, asked critical questions about the content and design of the project. The lesson ignited the process of establishing group expectations – such as setting up a plan to distribute each group's workload and setting timelines for the group. All in all, we felt the lesson went smoothly.

Yet in reflecting on the lesson and talking about how it went later that day, we both felt uneasy. Something needed to be addressed. And that something connected to the way in which the unit-planning project parameters, as well as the overview provided in class, placed emphasis on responsive teaching for social justice-embedded teaching. While the project requires students to respond to an equity-related issue observed in the teaching-learning context, it does not intend to do so at the expense of proactive pedagogy. Manu articulated the problem by expressing concern that students in the class might have gotten the impression that we valued responsive social justice pedagogy

proactive social justice pedagogy. After talking about this concern, one we both agreed was important, we decided to speak with the class about proactive pedagogy in the following lesson, on Tuesday September 30 2014.

Analysis of Vignette 1 (Cam's Narrative)

In this narrative, the authors collaboratively developed and facilitated a lesson plan that started students on a journey of developing a social justice-informed unit plan. While Cam took the lead in this lesson Manu was also active at all stages, from planning, to implementing, to post-lesson reflecting. The lesson itself was purposeful, and was infused with direct thinking and talking about social justice as a part of students' pedagogy. Specifically, the lesson was designed to introduce students to the unit plan project – a major course assignment – through discussion, and in doing so provide scaffolding. Yet, as the above-outlined vignette indicates, the lesson may have sent a message the authors did *not* intend to put forward. In retrospect, it was because the authors critically reflected on the lesson – and their delivery of it – that they were better able to identify this *possible* message and then talk about it—initially among themselves and subsequently with the class.

As collaborators who are comfortable being constructive and open with one another (i.e., about aspects of lessons that worked well as well as aspects that did *not* work well), the authors were better positioned to pinpoint areas to improve upon in our practice. In the case of this narrative, Manu helped Cam to identify how an unintended message may have been communicated, and the two then devised a plan to address this possible misunderstanding. It is possible that Manu was better positioned to pick up on this unintended message, as she had taken on more of a supporting role in the lesson. As such, this critical self-reflexive eye is a key benefit of the co-teaching dynamic (in this case, in the *one teach, one assist* and *one teach, one observe* frameworks) (Conderman, 2011). Ultimately, it is important to note that when reflecting with a critical lens – or, in the case of a co-teaching dynamic, multiple critical lenses – educators are exercising a principle of social justice- recognizing the nuances and silences in dialogue.

The authors set up a plan to open the subsequent lesson (lesson four) by co-leading a discussion that very briefly reviewed the parameters of the project, and gave the class an opportunity to discuss the importance of both proactive and responsive social justice. Rather than speaking first, the authors brought up this subject by posing critical reflection questions to the class, including: How can we think of any power dynamics or inequities that occurred but we were unable to pinpoint? Were there any nuances of silence in dialogues in which the teacher directed the discussion? What does power feel like when students are being shut down in conversation? By posing these questions, the authors encouraged students to critically reflect on dialogues or experiences they had while in practicum that may not have been visible or explicit but potentially were there, and influenced the students in the classrooms.

At this point, the authors opened up a conversation with the class to draw their attention to the difference between proactive and responsive social justice pedagogy. This distinction then helped create a critical consciousness about thinking in both proactive and responsive ways to social justice issues—especially with respect to the fluidity of power. For the authors, (re)posing critical reflection questions was essential in

developing the critical consciousness that naturally emerged through dialect and dialogue in our teacher candidates. It is due to the co-teaching model informed by social justice pedagogy that the authors were able to create an atmosphere that encouraged critical reflection questions and courageous conversation about the implications of invisible power in classrooms. The students acknowledged that while this course project focuses on the responsive approach to social justice issues, both are essential to social justice-informed pedagogy itself. Because students were able to draw this conclusion through discussion, the authors felt satisfied that the complication was addressed and they were happy that it got addressed through dialogue, in a learner-centered way.

In hindsight, the authors both realized that this experience of critically reflecting on the sort of *message* put forward in a lesson (even an unintended or invisible one) was more likely to be identified and addressed with two co-teachers critically reflecting (rather than one single teacher critically reflecting). The thoughtful and constructively critical approach co-teachers can bring to their practice (assuming that they trust one another) enriches the learning experience not only for students but also for the co-teachers themselves. The unique component in this reflection process is the opportunity that both authors had to provide two different perspectives on what happened in class. In order for this sort of inter/reflective and inter/supportive dialogue to occur, co-teachers need to be constructively (and actively) critical of one another, and they need to communicate their critical feedback in a manner both are comfortable with. Co-teachers who have a social justice-informed pedagogy need to have trust in one another in order to acknowledge and then respond to each other with critical feedback. Such honest feedback – feedback that looks at the silences and tensions in the teaching and learning experience – is important for *all* aspects of holistic co-teaching, from the planning stage to the reflecting-on-the-lesson stage.

Learning the Learners (Manu's Narrative)

On September 30, 2014 we started our class of with a few announcements about taking a responsive and proactive stance with equity issues in the school environment that teacher candidates find themselves in during their practicum placements. Following this we shared that the central focus of this class would be on a case study entitled, "Ali's Prayer" from the course textbook. This case study was provided to the 40 students in our class as a reading since the beginning of the semester. However, to refresh everyone's memory and give an opportunity for all to participate in the analysis of the case study, we asked for a student volunteer to summarize the case. The student recapped the following key summary:

There was a student named Ali in an elementary school who would miss Friday afternoons to attend religious prayers of his Islamic faith. His teacher would provide the student with the classwork he was missing and they had an understanding that he would complete it and keep up with the class. Ali was a good student and had no trouble keeping up with the work he missed on Fridays. However, the principal was notified by the school secretary about Ali's consistent absences on Fridays and thus called in the teacher to discuss his truancy.

Ali was committed to his faith and did not want to choose between school and religion so pleaded that the teacher give him his work. The teacher continued on providing lessons despite the suggestions given to her by the principal.

After the summary was provided. Students were asked in small groups to identify equity issues within the story and then to respond to them from the perspective of the teacher, student and administrator. We then had one group representative share some of these concerns back to the whole class. There was overlap in the themes identified, namely, religion, human rights, power dynamics, and public education. To extend the conversation we had developed a different but more complicated case study that also highlighted the same issues. Here is the handout we gave the students.

An Extension of the case study: *Your Turn!*

Imagine the following:

You are a teacher who holds Christian beliefs. Your grade seven class has 35 students. There are six Muslim students, 11 Jewish students, 10 Atheist students, eight Christian students in your class. On Friday afternoons the six Muslim students would leave for the mosque to pray and the other students have noticed and claim it is unfair. How would you address this?

Eight perspectives that allow you to think about community, educational policy, and human rights:

1. Muslim Students' parents perspective
2. Muslim student perspective
3. Teacher's perspective x2
4. Non-religious student perspective
5. Jewish students perspective
6. Christian students perspective
7. Principal

Figure 1 – Lesson Handout

As a result the students were put into seven groups and each were asked assigned one of the respective perspectives as listed in the handout. They were told to develop the perspective and consider how they would feel from that particular position and that in a few minutes they would share back with the whole class.

The conversation that transpired was full of divergent perspectives and themes/considerations student brought forth demonstrated the large variance in each of their personal values, biases and lived experiences. Below is an image of what Cam recorded on the board while I facilitated the conversation.

Analysis of Vignette 2 (Manu's Narrative)

Although the extended activity asked for multiple perspectives in developing the perspectives, by taking on the role-play many students had a different understanding of how to articulate those perspectives. This variance was apparent in the short presentations done by the teacher candidates, and the authors drew out the theme of plurality and dissonance when examining social issues such as religion in the classroom. Cam and Manu commented on how individual lived experiences shape one's understanding of the lenses people take when role-playing. Cam spoke from the lens of being a parent and the privileges and power with which that comes, and Manu spoke from the lens of a classroom teacher and administrator. The authors' narratives clashed in their values and perspectives but enriched the dialogue in the class. Because Manu and Cam co-taught with a lens of social justice-informed pedagogy, they invited the dissonance and allowed for the plurality of values and perspectives to co-exist in the classroom. The authors appreciated the opportunity to minimize power struggles and became comfortable having multi-dimensional dialogues in the class that allowed for transparency on controversial issues in education. As a result, Manu and Cam were able to draw students' attention to the level of plurality and complexity within taking up any case by pointing out how different value systems and lived experiences influence decision-making.

Secondly, the authors highlighted the issues of power and privilege that were inherent in the way perspectives were shared and heard in the case study activity. They asked teacher candidates to consider the position of the authority that an elementary student has who wishes to bring religion into the public schools. Consequently, teacher candidates were encouraged to challenge themselves to embody the lens through which a student views their teacher as well as their rights in a school. It was interesting that even in asking teacher candidates to embody the lens of a public school student; as their co-teachers, the authors had different understandings of what power students held in school. Cam is a White male and Manu is an East Indian female, and their public schooling experiences, which they shared, illustrated the gap between power and privilege based on race. These strong moments of narrative sharing provided a deeper insight for the predominantly homogenous student population of White females.

This co-teaching informed by social justice pedagogy provided a window into conversations that often are left unsaid, but because of who the authors are, they brought these conversations alive in the classroom. Cam and Manu shared their perspectives on the matter from when they themselves were students and classroom teachers. Some of the social justice-informed questions that emerged from these conversations included: How much clout do parents have with administration, and how can this change when they are immigrant parents? How does racial and identity traits influence controversial issues in education, such as religious practices in public schools? The authors' teacher candidates had moments of recognizing the messiness in the hierarchy that supports power structures within the school, student/teacher/parent identities, and the organization of people within it.

Finally, Cam and Manu engaged with students when they brought forth particular issues of human rights, equality, communication, policy, freedom, teacher control, community, and respect. Some students stated there was no place for religion in public schools, some spoke in response that it was their human right, and some said that Fridays

should just be taken off of compulsory schooling. As students dialogued and Manu facilitated the conversation, Cam wrote the major points on the board and often pushed the class further by questioning the implicit biases within their perspectives. This collaborative, multi-perspective approach allowed capturing a rich variety of equity issues inherent in the extended case study. In this co-teaching with a social justice-informed pedagogy, the authors were able to offer a new pedagogical approach to having courageous conversations about religion in public schools.

By using a co-teaching dynamic with social justice-informed pedagogy, the authors put forth the idea of considering what was best for the student's learning experience in public schools. Moreover, they indicated how their own co-teaching approach was itself a form of collaborative social justice-informed teaching, which provided multiple entry points, deeper dialogue and critical questioning that would not have happened if the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course were a sole instructor-based class. Manu and Cam encouraged students to take a co-teaching model informed by social justice values, into their next practicum opportunity, as it provides a unique and excellent format to address diverse student populations.

Bringing Together the Two Vignettes

There is a welcomed overlap in the benefits and possibilities that a co-teaching model using a social justice-informed pedagogy has in both the vignettes. The authors claim that if both components of this unique opportunity to co-teach using a social justice-informed pedagogy were not in place then the impact and experience of (1) *student learning,* (2) *teacher learning,* and (3) *teacher education program initiatives* would not be the same and would not create a space to think outside of traditional school culture and its practices. For example, (1) *student learning* and (2) *teacher learning* in this model can provide deeper insight on transparency with respect to understanding power relations between two instructors and how the traditional model of one authority figure and one standard answer/perspective is disrupted. Moreover, this model allows for students to vocalize multiple perspectives and complexities in equity issues, which may not arise if the conversation were one-sided with a single instructor. The fact that Cam and Manu, as instructors, had different value systems and life experiences also provided students an opportunity to engage with different entry points into the dialogue and activities done in the lessons.

As co-instructors, the authors also experienced a learning curve as they engaged in a process of sharing power, taking a chance with a less traditional style of teaching at the post-secondary level in the teacher education program. The (2) *teacher learning* and (3) *teacher education program* also shared an interdependent relationship because our co-teaching model informed by social justice was new for the program and us. Manu and Cam submitted a request to co-teach this mandatory course on controversial issues in contemporary education and both knew that some students were not interested in taking it but as a program requirement had to take it.

In hindsight when looking back at this model of co-teaching informed by social justice, the authors see that it provides a springboard in itself for students to think about what non-traditional schooling practices and pedagogies may look like and what possibilities arise out of them. Both authors believe that teacher education programs –

which often uphold values of collaboration, cooperation, innovative thinking, critical dialogue and reflective practice –lend themselves into this model of co-teaching informed by social justice. Otherwise teacher education courses are left vulnerable at times to the critique of not modeling what they preach to be best practices. As educators the authors have found this experience to be refreshing and insightful and as a result both encourage it be taken up in teacher education programs.

Implications of Findings

To understand the larger implications of the findings the authors have identified three key themes for research and practice. These themes include: (1) *Teacher Education Program*, (2) *Teaching Practices and Field Experience*, and (3) *Co-Teacher Trust.*

Teacher Education Program

Setting Up. In order to successfully engage in social justice-informed co-teaching, colleagues need to negotiate the foundations of their partnership. First, they need to establish course parameters, through compromise. These parameters need to ensure that students will not only encounter equity-oriented topics in class, but they must also ensure that teaching methods empower students and model social justice pedagogy. As such, both lesson content and the learning space need to present students with opportunities to encounter, reflect on, and critically discuss social issues associated with contemporary education. Before the course even begins, co-teachers need to agree upon the social justice-informed learning outcomes, as well as the learning experiences, and course assessments. In collaboratively setting up these course parameters, co-teachers need to dialogue with one another. On an institutional level, post-secondary faculties and departments would benefit from providing opportunities for co-teachers to engage in this sort of dialogue prior to the beginning of a new school year, or semester. Further studies need to examine ways in which faculties and departments provide support and guidance as co-teachers work to set up their social justice-informed teaching partnerships.

Teaching Practices and Field Experiences

Feedback Loop. Inter/reflective and inter/supportive co-teachers – those who are willing and able to provide, receive, and act on critical feedback – are able to engaged in self-reflections, and they are also able to seek out and respond to feedback from their teaching partner. Because holistic co-teachers are constantly working together, they are better able to provide ongoing thoughtful feedback, which they may then collaboratively work to address. When teachers strive to provide social justice-informed learning experiences, this access to ongoing feedback and reflective dialogue not only enriches their pedagogy, but it also enriches the experiences of their students. This level of feedback, supportive dialogue, and collaborative honing of practice is only possible in a teaching partnership. Simply put, when co-teachers provide constructive feedback to one another, and then help one another to enrich their practice, *they've got one another covered*.

Communication Loop. Holistic social justice-informed co-teaching requires ongoing communication between co-teachers. This communication involves debriefing sessions, planning sessions, and conferencing about larger matters, such as the direction of the course itself. These sessions can be face-to-face, and they can also be arranged via email, phone, or Skype—depending on scheduling and availability of the teaching partners. Co-teachers need to arrange times to dialogue before and after lessons. It is important that co-teachers meet regularly between lessons so that they may collaboratively reflect on how the previous lesson went, and then plan their following lesson. They need to discuss how students responded to the social justice content and learning activities of the previous lesson, and consider how they will build on this in the subsequent lesson.

Faculties and departments of education need to prepare partner teachers to establish a culture of ongoing collaboration and dialogue. Providing spaces and common planning times for partner teachers to meet and dialogue can help to foster an atmosphere firmly rooted in rich feedback and collaboration. Research studies need to identify and examine exemplar schools, where social justice-informed co-teaching and communication is both encouraged and supported.

Co-Teacher Trust

Feedback and Trust. For co-teachers to engage in a healthy, thoughtful partnership, they need to provide one another with honest and critical feedback. They need to tell one another when plans that one co-teacher put forward is problematic. They also need to point out times where the social justice content or methodology of a lesson plan, or lesson, could be adjusted for the better. Moreover, while facilitating classroom activities that delve into equity-oriented challenges and issues in education, co-teachers need to critically observe one another's practices—the way they speak, the way they move around the learning space, the way they conference with individuals and small groups, and the way they pose and respond to student questions. In addition, for co-teachers to be able to support one another – and make decisions and changes to lessons, before, during, *and* after lessons – they need to trust one another's judgment. Yet how can they establish a sense of trust? Moreover, how might they model these trust building practices and then encourage teacher candidates to use them in their field placements.

Additional research needs to focus on the dimension of building trust in social justice-infused co-teaching partnerships. There is a need for studies to examine how co-teaching partnerships are formed, as well as how co-teaching partners initially dialogue on how social justice pedagogy will form a central part of their collaborative teaching venture. Such research studies could also explore how co-teachers continue to dialogue as they establish patterns of providing and responding to one another's feedback, before, during, and after lessons. On a larger institutional scale, it would be beneficial to analyze how faculties and departments of education support trust building between co-teachers between and among new and experienced faculty.

Conclusion

While co-teaching has received more and more attention over the past few decades, there is a lack of research done on social justice-informed co-teaching and its merits (Sharma & Cobb). In recent years, a smattering of research studies has discussed methods and challenges associated with social justice-infused co-teaching, however, these studies do not highlight the benefits and the need for such pedagogy (Ball, 2009; Mensah, 2011). This critical qualitative inquiry, in part, addresses the current gap in the literature. By documenting their experiences in co-teaching a course on *Contemporary Issues in Education*, the authors critically discuss two narratives, and in doing so they articulate implications for research, and teacher education programs, teaching practices and field experiences, and co-teachers themselves. While teachers who are working alone may certainly offer rich experiences in social justice pedagogy, the co-teaching dynamic presents unique opportunities, which are only available through collaboration. When a robust, holistic co-teaching partnership is established, dialogue is rich, feedback is critical, and responsiveness is enriched. In such a partnership, those who aim to teach social justice-infused pedagogy truly have one another covered.

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