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“I Guess I Just Realized How Tired I Had Become”

In Defense of Insurgent Pedagogy

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Abstract

This manuscript details how four self-described justice-oriented teachers, teaching social studies in urban schools maintained, defended, and expanded their teaching in unsupported environments. All four teachers are veteran educators who teach intentionally chose their school sites deliberately and can all be labeled activist educators, though one uncomfortably. Taken from a larger 5 year study, this article seeks to describe the actions taken by four teachers during the first two years of the study who teach in similar socio-economic, geographic and school spaces and who all attended the same justice oriented teacher education program. These four teachers prove that it is possible to teach for social justice in unsupportive schools but also indicate that are costs. These costs raise serious questions about the sustainability of their efforts over time.



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Introduction

“I engaged him in an argument...about the words he was using...he wasn’t ready for that. I’m still not sure which was more shocking for him, me speaking...or me knowing. Regardless...I won...well, for now anyway.”—Ms. Cruz

Ms. Cruz outlined the main dilemma facing many justice-oriented teachers today. How do we successfully defend our teaching practice? And when (if) we are successful, how do we extend it? The purpose of this article was to describe how four United States history teachers took steps to defend and protect their critical (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Ross, 2017) justice-oriented (North, 2009; Sleeter, 2014; Swalwell, 2013), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and critically multicultural (Au, 2008; McClaren, 1998) pedagogy and curriculum. Specifically, this research was looking for how they were able to teach this way, what strategies they employed, and what relationships they engaged in to be able to continue this work that was not endorsed by the larger school system and structure. This project went looking for teachers. As Apple noted we are existing in a conservative restoration (2006) with conditions that would “shock the conscience” (Oakes & Lipton, 2004, as quoted by Anderson, 2010). I went looking for teachers who were not only interested in disrupting and interrupting (Apple, 2006) but for teachers who had done it for a sustained period of time to better understand how they were able to defend, maintain and possibly expand their pedagogy.

This manuscript represents the first analysis of the second year of four of nine teachers who are part of a longitudinal 5-year study. All four teachers self-identify as justice-oriented and teach in urban schools with students of color and have been teaching for at least ten years. Two, Mr. Torres and Ms. Cruz¹, taught in large comprehensive high schools that have and are going through a constant cycle of reform that has included the development of small schools (Cuban, Lichtenstein, Evenchek, Tombari, & Pozzobini, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Hantzopolous & Tyner-Mullings, 2012), 9th grade academies (Darling-Hammond, 2007), and a return to one comprehensive school. Another, Ms. Jones taught in a small school within a school (Cuban, Lichtenstein, Evenchek, Tombari, & Pozzobini, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Hantzopolous & Tyner-Mullings, 2012), that moved off campus, eventually to another school, perpetually in a fight with the district for its life, finally becoming a magnet program. Ms. Jules, the fourth teacher taught in a long-standing magnet program with an embedded medical theme, which is connected to a local hospital.

Critical and Social Justice Teaching

Exemplifying Sleeter’s (2014) pillars of social justice teaching—which are: situate families and communities in structural analysis; develop relationships with students, families and communities; have high academic expectations; and teach an inclusive curriculum—all four teachers developed inquiry- and discussion-based pedagogies (Evans, 2015) which focused on justice-oriented themes and questions to highlight power differences, issues of race and class, gender and LGBTQ that were not readily highlighted in the standard curriculum. All four teachers infused their U.S. History curriculum with elements of ethnic studies (Acosta & Mir, 2012; Takaki, 2008; Tintiangco-Cubales, Kohli, Sacramento, Henning, Agarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter, 2014). They push back indirectly against district mandates that require a more standardized, standards-based curriculum and pedagogy with a

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

focus on raising test scores, and directly toward members of their school sites who urge curricular unification. Meanwhile, administration and colleagues question their curricular and pedagogical stances in classroom observations with administrators, in department meetings, small school meetings, and Professional Learning Communities (Dufour, Dufor, & Eaker, 2008).

Teacher Agency, Autonomy and Resistance

Paris (1993) reminds us that there was a time when “educators, legislators and child and family advocates” (p. 1) called for the growth of teacher agency and involvement in curriculum design to raise the professionalism of teaching, improve the quality of education, and create a more productive nation (Paris, 1993). While there were always “hotspots” throughout American history where this occurred (Cuban, 1993) including the Dewey School (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936), McDonald County, Missouri (Kilpatrick, 1923) and Winnetka, Illinois (Washburne & Marland, 1963), Apple (1983, 1986) indicates this has been far from the norm. As the intensification of teaching has increased (Apple, 1986) so has the assumption that teachers cannot be responsible for developing curriculum (Walker, 1978) with critics arguing they don’t have the knowledge necessary to do so (Rosow & Zager, 1989). Castigan and Crocco (2004) describe a “brave new world” of accountability systems and high stakes testing that challenges teacher independence and agency. Anderson (2010) writes compellingly of a young teacher’s challenge to this approach with a detailed account of the success at growing equity-based education in a charter school by developing and implementing a network of teacher connectivity and support.

Teachers who seek autonomy by twisting, shifting, and creating new curriculum have been called renegades (Author, 2015; Paris, 1993), a compliment, and conservative obstructers (Paris, 1993), a critique. Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) refute the argument that teacher resistance is a conservative response (p. 23) or a psychological deficit (p. 32). Instead, they argue, teachers exert “principled resistance” through “overt or covert acts that reject instructional policies, programs, or other efforts to control teachers’ work” (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006, p. 32). Similarly, Mills (1997) describes teacher resistance as a “disruptive pedagogy”, or practices that seek to disrupt the discourse of teaching as usual which allows for a critique of school processes by students and teachers (p. 36) as well as provides space for exploration of other possibilities and alternatives. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) identify types of resistance within school systems. Most significant is transformational resistance that allows for both a “critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (p. 319). This resistance serves to weaken domination and oppression moving toward positive change. Several scholars have argued that resistance needs to be more than critical pedagogy or limited to a school-based context (Apple, 2006; Noguera, Tuck, & Yang, 2014). The pedagogy itself cannot be “emancipatory or liberatory” (Noguera, Tuck & Yang, 2014); rather, concerted and organized action must be engaged. Agreeing with Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), Noguera argues not all school-based oppositional behavior is resistance, or at least not transformational.

On an individual level the concept of dangerous citizenship (Ross & Vinson, 2011) may be the epitome of autonomy, agency, and resistance. Taking inspiration from Dewey’s notion of schools as a means of social control (Ross & Vinson, 2011, p. 155) and the social re-constructionist notion that schools should always work toward social change (p. 156), dangerous citizenship argues that teachers and students should take on “certain necessary dangers” to create the possibility and space for change. The danger of dangerous citizenship leans toward hierarchical power structures but has danger for the participants as well. Within

dangerous citizenship are three cores—political participation, critical awareness, and intentional action. For teachers and schools this means enacting a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Freire & Shor, 1988; Shor, 1992) within constrained systems to expand or end those systems around these cores.

Guiding Questions

Guided by the question, “How do teachers maintain, defend, and extend justice-oriented teaching in our current neoliberal educational context?” this paper unpacks and discusses the implications of how these teachers defended their pedagogical and curricular choices proactively and openly within the structures under which they were operating.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this paper is embedded in Critical Theory. Critical pedagogy is a term not without complication, but the one I feel most closely connects to the type of teaching, teachers, and resistance sought for this study. Developed from the Frankfurt School, Critical Theory is a wide and disparate term inclusive of many philosophical moorings including Marxian (Anyon, 2005, 2011), queer (Blackburn, 2013; Sapp, 2013), gender (Marshall & Anderson, 2008), and critical race theories (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Despite this, there are agreed upon generalizations under Critical Theory such as assumptions of unequal power distributions (Apple, 2006) causing those on the margins to be kept from power. Those without power are kept from deciding what counts as official knowledge and how it is to be taught in schools (Apple, 2014). A critical theoretical frame purposefully challenges and seeks to interrupt the established system of reproduction (Apple, 2003, 2006; Giroux, 1988, 2011; McLaren, 1998), and calls for a robust praxis and *conscientização* (Freire, 1970), or critical awareness, which leads to social action. This in turn, pushes the “subaltern”, those with little official power to speak and offer an interruption (Apple & Buras, 2006), as exemplified by the teachers in this study.

Research Methodology

The four participants featured in this paper were taken from the ongoing study’s nine participants. Each of the teachers represent instrumental case studies (Stake, 1995) with their classrooms constituting the “bounded system” of the case study. Four teachers were chosen for this paper because they had a similar number of years teaching and taught in geographically and socio-economically similar neighborhoods and successfully defended their justice-oriented teaching. All teach from a social justice perspective in urban school settings, and have taught for between 12 and 15 years. Each holds an undergraduate degree focusing on a social science content area and a Master’s degree in education.

Data for this paper came from four 120-180 minute semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994) conducted with each teacher during the early fall and spring semesters of the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. This interview cycle (once per semester) will continue for five years in total. This paper represents the first four cycles or first two years of the research project. Most interviews were in person, most often in the teachers’ classrooms, while one took place in a local coffee shop, and one, for participant convenience, took place through Skype. The interviews were semi-structured (Merriman, 1998; Yin, 1994) with a series of open ended questions meant to spark discussion between the participants and the researcher, allowing participants to think out loud, use ideas and information from their past, and think through exactly what they had done and the choices

they had made. Instead of using a “unidirectional model of interviewing” (Segall, 2002 p. 29), participants were instead engaged in “active interviews” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), which Segall (2002) describes as a “collaborative, interpretive practice” where both interviewer and interviewee are meaning makers, analyzing and theorizing about their teaching practice and how they work to defend and expand it. To help the conversations gain traction and to specify and deepen them, an elicitation device (Barton, 2015) was used, which is a discussion tool to push thinking and conversation about issues or ideas which can otherwise be ephemeral (Appendix 1). The elicitation device used was a “sort” (Barlowe, 2003) asking participants to rank particular choices that justice-oriented teachers could make. The same elicitation device was used during each interview, most often at the end as a way to see if their perspective on resistance had changed since the previous interview.

All interviews were transcribed and coded twice. The first cycle transcripts were open coded to themes to emerge from the data. Codes such as “social justice teaching”, “conflict”, “support”, and “sustainability” emerged. The second cycle NVivo was used and a priori codes chosen. These codes included “resistance”, “tension”, “strategic”, and “defining” amongst others. Descriptive case memos were written, member checks engaged and participant feedback was added to findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each participant’s teaching was observed at least twice per interview cycle to ensure that the teaching was similar to how it was described by the teachers. Field notes were taken and compared with interview data. While it would strengthen this study to observe each participant regularly, due to the number of participants and the geographic distance between them and myself as the researcher, it is not possible. Observations will continue, however, when possible.

Findings

All four teachers exhibited several elements of Apple’s (2013) “Tasks of the Critical Scholar/Activist” (p. 39). All participants “bore witness to negativity”, engaged in “critical analysis”, sought “space for action”, “reconstructed elite knowledge” so that it served “genuinely progressive needs”, and both “acted in concert with other social and progressive movements” (p. 40-43). None of the teachers would self-label as scholar (though the label fits), but each of them would self-label as activists (one, most likely, reluctantly). Finally, all four teachers operationalized these elements of the critical scholar differently.

The participants saw an activist stance as a natural outgrowth of their teaching, not only as an example for students (Bigelow, 2008; Zinn, 2002) but as a recognition that their curriculum and pedagogy were outside the norm of what their district (and in one case, school) expected. Rather than “lay low” as some teachers choose or are reluctantly forced to do (Duncan-Andrade, 2007), remaining silent so they can continue to teach on the margins, or giving into frustration and teaching “defensively” (McNeil, 1986), these teachers instead attempted a transformational resistance (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001) where they worked to disrupt and interrupt (Apple, 2014) traditional social studies teaching. The sections below highlight the overarching themes that emerged from these participants’ struggles to enact, defend, and expand their notions of critical social studies.

Pedagogically each of the four teachers exhibited elements of an ethnic studies pedagogy (Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2014). The teachers had difficulty separating their pedagogy from their curriculum, from their identities as teachers. As Ms. Jones indicated, “I have such a hard time telling people that all I am is a teacher. It’s more than that. I’m a pedagogue, social scientist, community leader (classroom), writer (of curriculum), facilitator, activist...I’m mean I’m a ton of stuff that is more than teacher.” In this way they ascribe to Tintiangco-Cubales’s notion of pedagogy (2010), which describes pedagogy as a philosophy

that doesn't separate purpose, context, content, methods and identity. The teaching exhibited by the four teachers was culturally responsive, community connected, engrained in teacher identity and works at decolonizing the classroom (Tintiango-Cubales, et al., 2014). As Ms. Cruz said, "A friend said I was a de-colonizer...but what does that mean? I mean I read de-colonial literature and I'm always like...what??? It sounds sexy and all but...I just say I'm encouraging my students to re-imagine what's possible."

Rather than submit to the pressure or becoming "defensive teachers" (McNeil, 1986) all four defended their pedagogy and curriculum in distinct and purposeful ways. Two took leadership positions within their schools becoming department chairs and lead teachers in attempts to guide the narrative of what good teaching would be in their school. One teacher, Mr. Torres, became the Common Core lead teacher in an effort to understand it and bend it toward his pedagogy and curriculum (Kohli, 2013). The other teacher, Ms. Jones, took a very active role in her district's union, helping to develop and strengthen its progressive wing focused on justice-oriented teaching. Ms. Cruz took an opportunity offered by her principal and developed a now famous 9th grade ethnic studies program directly connected to the neighborhood surrounding her school. Mr. Torres sought outside organizations that had standing within both the school and district communities including a local university with a focus on justice and equity for marginalized and underserved communities (Oakes, Rogers & Lipton, 2006). Ms. Jones was the founder of a small school that went on to display many of the signifiers of a "critical small school" (Hantzopoulos & Tyner-Mullings, 2012) that offered support and protection. Ms. Jules taught complex material and pedagogy incredibly well, garnering a reputation among her more senior colleagues that caused a shift in department focus. Both Mr. Torres and Ms. Cruz worked with teachers at other schools and organized a justice-oriented conference and curriculum fair. Ms. Jules developed an interdisciplinary course with a fellow like-minded English Language Arts teacher that strengthened, supported and emboldened her critical teaching. All participants indicated that they had been justice-oriented for some time. They indicated that they had an awareness of poverty, oppression, but weren't sure how to struggle against it. All of them credited their justice-oriented teacher education program with deepening their understanding of critical teaching and how to effectively engage students in it.

Teaching well. Most significantly, all four participants indicated that the most crucial factor to defending and expanding justice-oriented teaching is doing it well. Though there were variations in how each participant described critical or justice-oriented teaching specifically there were shared universal elements. These universal elements included a critical interrogation of race, class, power, gender, LGBTQAI, and oppression within content. There was also a focus on resistance, particularly in helping students to identify their own agency (Gillen, 2014) and grow it. The intention being that students should learn to advocate for themselves, their community, and others. Space was made for content and critical questions left out of the official curriculum (Apple, 2014). Pedagogically, inquiry, discussion, and art were centered and celebrated. They indicated that this was difficult to do, especially for new teachers, but of incredible importance. As Ms. Jules shared, "I would have won no arguments with my department if my teaching was a mess." She described how another teacher in her department attempted to influence the direction of the department, in a way she described as, "AP for everybody...listen to me talk...then do this work that is meaningless..." format but got nowhere. He didn't get anywhere Ms. Jules argues, not because the majority of the teachers disagreed with his arguments necessarily, but because he had no standing within the department. "He didn't connect with students, papers were never given back, his room's a mess...the hard thing is though that to hear him talk...man, he can talk...you'd think he was Gandhi of teachers..." But because teachers from her department

had seen him in the hallways, walked past his classroom, they understood who he was and though he spoke often in department meetings his comments carried no weight.

As Mr. Torres explained, “And it’s tough...it really is. Especially for new teachers, but to the question on how to defend your teaching...you have to have something to defend.” He recommended that new teachers, if they have a choice, to try to find a supportive environment, and lacking that, try to find one that is not toxic or combative. His recommendation for new teachers is to focus on successful justice-oriented teaching to the “detriment of all else”. Mr. Torres recommended that new teachers “become a department ghost”, something that Picower calls “camouflaging” (2012), that is, hiding your justice-oriented teaching while you work to strengthen and improve it. Torres said that he didn’t do this exactly, he didn’t “hide” his teaching, he taught openly, but he didn’t engage in complicated discussions with colleagues or “try to convince anyone” in the beginning.

All four teachers described the great lengths they went to insure that they developed into strong teachers. The four teachers understood that by stepping out of traditional curricular and pedagogical pathways they had to be better and stronger teachers. Teaching differently was difficult, all four indicated. The schools they worked in wanted “success” and the success was measured as compliant students who did well on tests. Two described mentors, one a university professor, and the other a teacher she had met at a conference who had passed on curriculum and inklings of a pedagogy to help them develop one on their own. They described teaching as an experiment that they would be constantly growing from. This Ms. Jules indicated most clearly, helped her in the trying first days of her teaching. “It was a complete disaster...I mean the Northridge Earthquake kind of bad. But, I got to know my students, I got to know their community. I realized I’m not them and they’re not me, but the teaching could create a oneness amongst us.”

Each indicated that they came out of their teacher education programs with a “gut knowledge” of what they wanted their classrooms to be and a blurry outline but it took work. They bought and read books on content, explored standards for areas of expansion and as Cruz indicated “exploitation” and curricula that was available on line. Two teachers indicated that the People’s Education Movement and Facing History and Ourselves² helped them develop, think through, and extend their pedagogy. “It took a long time...forever,” Mr. Torres explained to figure out what all four realized at different times, teaching thematically around a question or theme, that combines slices of multiple time periods that is intentionally connected to their students’ present time and experience was strong teaching. The unit design came easiest Ms. Cruz indicated, “I learned it in my masters program but didn’t really know how to do it. I figured it out first, it was intellectual work, no students around...but discussion...aaahhhhh, that was hard.” Actually doing the pedagogy with fidelity was difficult, Ms. Cruz indicated.

All four indicated that “showing growth was important”, but all four esewed test scores. During interviews all four visibly winced or sunk their shoulders and sighed when test scores were mentioned. They understood that demonstrating growth in some capacity was necessary so they showed growth in different ways. Mr. Torres and Ms. Jules engaged students in a Youth Participatory Action Research Project (Y-PAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2015) that had publicly advertised performances where

² The People’s Education Movement is a grassroots educator (mostly teacher) collective focused on decolonizing and radicalizing schools particularly the pedagogy and curriculum. Facing History and Ourselves is an education non-profit organization focused on providing professional development to teachers to aid them having students explore complex content including issues of race, class, power, gender, LGBTQAI, and resistance.

parents and the school community were invited. They also intentionally took photos and videos of these events and displayed them prominently about their classrooms. Ms. Jones and Ms. Jules also collected and displayed artifacts that included Socratic Seminar maps that resulted from student dialogue that they hung from the walls that displayed growth in student engagement and took photos of important class presentations, projects, and writing. In short, they could easily demonstrate what they were working on with students and the impact it had on student learning.

Over time Torres became a “jailhouse lawyer”. Unlike the other teachers in this study, Mr. Torres prominently displayed the state social studies content standards and the Common Core State Standards on the walls of his classroom and spoke of them often to his students connecting his teaching and student learning to them. He indicated that he had done this since he began teaching. His reasoning was, “there’s some good stuff in them...I have problems with some of my friends who feel that these documents are evil or something.” He also felt that he needed to be able to articulate and defend his teaching and what better way to defend critical and justice-oriented teaching, he argued, than with the system’s own documents?

Defending pedagogy. Ms. Cruz agreed that teaching well was foundational to defending and expanding justice-oriented teaching but sighed and slouched a bit while saying this. She said the largest obstacles to teaching critically “are those who did it really badly.” She described teaching it badly as being authoritarian in nature: “You know when the teacher tells all the kids they’re oppressed and indoctrinated but doesn’t teach them how to free themselves...or maybe even worse I don’t know, like they (the teachers) give weak assignments. The students don’t read much, write much, create much or discuss anything...they’re either asked to do little or think about little...there’s no struggle...no self-reflection”. The sigh and the slouch came from a memory, she said. The memory Ms. Cruz connected to her attempts to learn how to teach critically and well. She indicated that over the years she had “gotten the odd question from a parent and several from different administrators” but none that rose to the level of confrontation until her fourth year of teaching. During her fourth year a new administrator arrived and was assigned to “support and evaluate” Ms. Cruz’s teaching. Similar to Mr. Torres she didn’t camouflage (Picower, 2012) her teaching, had found a small cadre of supportive teachers in the school and had begun to speak with department members about her teaching but had not become “activist” yet.

After the first observation the administrator left a note asking her about “indoctrination”, how she defined it, how it had been used in history and whether or not Ms. Cruz felt she was doing it. The second observation note asked similar questions about “mind control” and the third one asked about “brainwashing”. The administrator’s process was to leave notes based on his observations, give the teachers time to reflect and gather their thoughts and then meet.

As Ms. Cruz said, “So I was pissed at first, I could feel my heart racing, thinking that I was going to cry, or scream, or hit something. But instead, I calmed down, and explained my pedagogy, how social justice was about developing thinkers, not creating people who think like me.” She told the administrator calmly, as her heart pounded, looking steadily into his eyes how she asked critical questions and raised content that was important to consider that was not raised by traditional teaching materials. She said that she didn’t think he was convinced, but it did lead to a constructive series of conversations. Ms. Cruz is convinced that if she’d answered defensively, or if she’d changed her teaching pedagogy and approach to content, the administrator would have become more aggressive.

Cruz said that she was glad the question came when it did, fairly early in her career and she's glad she didn't back away from it. It set the tone for how to engage folks who disagree with her even when they might use hyperbolic language and accusations. "You have to be able to explain and articulate what and how you teach. You have to." She indicated that she had been impressed at how she was able to talk about her pedagogy and teaching with such detail and fluidity. This was part of her most prescient advice for new teachers with justice-oriented pedagogy in unsupportive environments: be able to explain yourself, clearly, specifically, passionately, and without getting angry. "It helps to quote research, or Freire and Dewey," she indicated.

Their teaching needed to have students engaged and growing and their students needed to be able to clearly articulate not only what they were studying, but how they were studying it and why this way. All four teachers intentionally explained their pedagogy, curricular choices, their essential and guiding questions, how it was different and why they made the choices they did. Ms. Cruz in particular often made a formal presentation to students with citations and supportive education theory. She explained, "The students can be our biggest advocates if we help give them something to say other than, 'her class is dope' or 'whack' or whatever. If they can explain what's different and why they like it...we're kind of golden." Ms. Cruz reported that other teachers commented on how specifically students spoke about her class using words like pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment.

Mr. Torres described engaging his entire department in shifting to a more discussion oriented and critical approach to pedagogy. "It was kind of a...well, a disaster..." he said. He had been teaching well for several years, the state content standards were being phased out as the Common Core State Standards were being phased in and the tests accompanying both were suspended. "So, in a sense, we were testless, what better time for re-invention...when was that ever going to happen again?" Mr. Torres engaged his department in a series of professional developments and discussion focused on teaching more thematically, introducing a more critical lens to the study of history. At first Mr. Torres was excited the department fully engaged, they discussed the texts he presented, they listened to each other, had passionate positions and supported their positions with conviction. For the first time in years he indicated that he looked forward to department meetings.

At about the fourth meeting, things began to change. The lines began to form and harden, quickly dividing the department in two factions that could most easily be labeled the "traditionalists" and the "progressives". The department began to geographically sit along these factional lines with the traditionalists occupying one side of the room and the progressives the other. "I don't want to use the term brainwashed...but they were brainwashed...they wouldn't even consider experimenting even on the unit or lesson level...they were still all where should we be by September and what should we have taught by Christmas..." He indicated that it was frustrating, so much so that the progressive faction attempted to talk him out of continuing the dialogues but he persisted. He couldn't explain why exactly other than he had committed to attempting change during this historic opportunity. Just as he was convinced it was a failure, a teacher from the traditional faction asked for his help. He wanted to reformat a unit to be more critical and more justice oriented. Mr. Torres indicated that over the course of the next two years he had conversations similar to this one with three other teachers from the traditionalist faction. It was far from revolutionary, but things did begin to change Torres said.

Word capture. The third theme to emerge was *word capture*. Word capture is when a word or term is being defined within a particular way, most often by those in power, and teachers as an act of resistance engage the term. By engaging it, they hope to recapture. In

this way, word capture represents a war of position (Gramsci, 1971), where in the fight against hegemony, the definition and interpretations of symbols and terms becomes incredibly important.

Both Mr. Torres and Ms. Cruz indicated that engaging terms became incredibly important as they began to design and implement a 9th grade ethnic studies course. Focused on inquiry and discussion with a justice orientation both teachers incorporated the production and analysis of art, Youth Participation Action Research (Y-PAR) where students investigated problems and issues within their school and community (Camarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra, Atero, & Morrell, 2016), and implemented restorative justice circles (Sellman & Cremin, 2013). Their school district and school had recently pushed increasing the academic and instructional *rigor* of all teaching school wide. It had even become part of the administrative observation document and evaluation criteria of good teaching. As word of the course design became known and it became understood that all 9th grade students would take the course criticism began to emerge from other teachers as well as administration. The art, emphasis on discussion and community investigation, as well as the restorative justice circles were accused of being less than rigorous.

“To the school and administration I guess, rigor was pretty simple...stack up more work...assign more readings...it was really code for be on the pacing guide, be test ready,” Ms. Cruz indicated. They both indicated that they had to go on the offensive in an attempt to shift the understanding of what *rigorous* instruction was. As department chair Mr. Torres spent time engaging social studies teachers in the elements of the ethnic studies class to help them understand the complex content and complicated pedagogy that was being implemented. Teachers examined the criteria and assignment sheets for the art projects and neighborhood research and “while there were no revelations...some respect seemed to be gained...” Mr. Torres shared. The critiques lessened and eventually died out almost all together.

Ms. Cruz, whose school had begun implementing restorative justice circles, took her concerns there. Over a series of meetings, she shared her feeling of being attacked surreptitiously for attempting to implement a complicated course. This turned into larger conversations about what teachers wanted for their students, and what the ethnic studies course was asking students and teachers to do. Thus began a series of conversations around recapturing the words around what constitutes “good teaching”. Ms. Cruz argued that the very concept of good teaching had been she had thought, irrevocably shifted and captured by the testing and standards mania. She indicated that she was happily incorrect. Ms. Cruz explained that she had entered the restorative justice circle angry and left with a sense of accomplishment and motion, the circle seemed to be an act of praxis (Freire, 1970) for her propelling her into continuing to develop the ethnic studies course and engage her colleagues around good teaching. The good teaching construct continued as a series of conversations both in the restorative justice circle and outside through which Ms. Cruz was able to continue to trouble the general and very narrow vision of good teaching as held by many teachers. Good teaching seemed to indicate good test scores, following the curriculum, and giving students much work to do. It did include art, discussion of complex issues, or equalizing and leveling conversations such as through RJ circles. “We don’t have an established definition of what good teaching is...which I don’t think is a bad thing...the conversation keeps going,” Ms. Cruz said.

Ms. Jones engaged the terms “achievement” and “growth” at her school. As part of her larger activist work, Ms. Jones was a union representative for her school, served on the union guiding council and was an organizer fighting for many justice-oriented causes. She

saw teaching as a combination of this activist work and saw the definitions that the schools and districts were using, largely driven by test score pressure as she said, “inhuman, without context, racist, and indirectly misogynistic”. The terms were reductive and she fought for a more expansive notion and understanding of both achievement and growth. To this end she ran for department chairperson and organized teacher professional development around how we define terms, why, and what impact they have. They engaged in deep reading, discussion and soon, she hopes to discussions around pedagogy and curriculum change.

Engaging Strategically. Ms. Jules chose to become the “ghost” that Mr. Torres recommended earlier. She shirked confrontation and hid from her department members. “Teaching was tough...in the beginning,” she said and “it took all my energy...focus...and drive to figure out what I was doing and how to do it. I had trouble connecting with my students...I didn’t want to connect to my department.” She gained standing by teaching well and gaining reputation for strong instruction that asked much, gave much and led to deep student understanding. Rather than using a textbook she created packets of information mainly focused on historical characters that she would use for role-plays and simulations that she called “character driven seminars”. Character driven seminars (CDS) represent a complex pedagogy that allows for a deep analysis of complex history. CDS involves students working in teams, representing the perspective of historical characters through art, delivered speeches, and a seminar style discussion. Ms. Jules indicated that, “students initially fear but then come to love them [CDS].” Students talked about how Jules taught to other teachers and her reputation grew, “also because students would drop the packets all over school, with my name on them,” Jules said.

She was encouraged by the assistant principal to run for department chair and to take other leadership positions, but she refused. On this, she commented, “There’s enough drama in teaching...and it’s hard work...I don’t want to miss class for some meeting.” She was also skeptical of some of the praise from her colleagues. Several teachers commented on the “fun activities” she did, belittling the rigor, pedagogical design, and learning power of the activities. They asked her, “How do you have time to do that and the real teaching?” Quickly, Ms. Jules decided that the only way to protect her teaching and possibly extend it was by doing it incredibly well. So, for some time, she labored on alone.

Eventually, a like minded English teacher was hired and they took it upon themselves to strategically develop a 9th grade interdisciplinary course combining their two courses and curriculum through essential questions, team projects, essays, seminars, and a huge Y-PAR project. The Y-PAR project just became known as “the big project” among students and faculty alike. Students combined historical and neighborhood research with the content of their classes to present large visual, oral, and written projects attempting to wrestle one of the course’s essential questions to the ground. The course was driven by many essential questions including: How do we create change? How do we emancipate ourselves? What is justice? The assistant principal who had been her advocate had since left to assume a head principal position and her school’s head principal who had left her well enough alone had retired. The new principal was pushing for “curricular uniformity”, that is, all teachers teaching the same material in a similar way, at similar times and assessing students in a uniform way for comparison.

“Oh, Hell no!” Ms. Jules told me about this. She and her teaching partner began to use the cultural capital that they had gained from years of successfully teaching differently. She began to do things she had never done before, such as arranging lunch meetings, asking to speak at department meetings, and inviting administration into her classroom to see what she and her partner had created. Ms. Jules even arranged a meeting between herself and the new

principal arguing for difference in pedagogy and teaching. Even though it “made her skin crawl” she used data, student test scores, improved attendance data and suspension rates, in conjunction with student evaluations Jules had a colleague administer at the end of every semester. To date, the advocacy has worked.

To strategically protect his pedagogy and teaching method, Mr. Torres seemed to volunteer for everything. He became the department chair, volunteered to become the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) lead teacher, began a young men of color empowerment group, and led a group of student researchers in an after school Youth Participation Action Research (Y-PAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016) group. Mr. Torres understood that with each new policy change come new regulations, new constraints that attempt to shift teaching and pedagogy toward the goal stated in the policy. He volunteered to be both the CCSS lead for the school and department chair because he understood that how the CCSS standards were presented, how they were defined and explained. Similar to what Mr. Torres did to defend ethnic studies generally, he engaged in *word capture*, helping his department and school break down and interpret what the standards said and using it to defend and implement a more critical, discussion-based pedagogy.

Both the male empowerment group and the Y-PAR group were connected to a prominent local university. Having both programs operating successfully at the school site were metaphorical “feathers in the cap” for the school itself and administration. Both programs were critical investigating issues of power including institutional racism, classism, gender, and LGBTQ. Both programs were focused on inquiry and discussion, growing student voice and become transformative in their resistance (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) by learning how to become change agents. This connection to the local university gave not only the programs freedom to implement pedagogy and content as they wished but also allowed Mr. Torres and others the opportunity to “ride the coattails” of these programs implementing the pedagogical approach more broadly in their own classrooms.

Two outgrowths of both of these programs led him to connect with a like-minded English Language Arts teacher (ELA) and pursue creating an interdisciplinary course implementing pedagogy similar to the young men of color institute and Y-PAR. This program was able to flourish due largely, Mr. Torres contended to the “coattail effect”. The second outgrowth was the formation of a teacher run community focused education group that held a day of workshops and curriculum sharing. It was held on school grounds and was supported by school administration even though it had a radical, anti-establishment, anti-standards and assessment perspective. It was tolerated largely because of its connection to the well earned reputation of the local university.

Ms. Jones and a small team of teachers took advantage of the district’s interest in dividing the large urban high school that she taught in into 5-7 small schools. As the district moved forward Ms. Jones and a team of 15 teachers developed a school theme, an academic outline, and connected it to a career, all as the request for proposal required. What she and her team added were a justice orientation and a student empowerment focus on inquiry, discussion, and interdisciplinary teaching. The theme had both an environmental and policy focus that satisfied both the necessary proposal and the educational vision her team had.

The small school was begun as a school within a school but when the opportunity to move off campus presented itself, they jumped at it. Due to overcrowding the small school became housed in one floor of a nearby adult education center. “The distance saved us,” Jones explained. It kept them from the toxic politics of the main school site and allowed them to cultivate and grow their own vision of what a school could be away from the searing glare of the main campus. It was at this alternative location that the small school began to develop

the attributes of a “critical small school” (Hanzopolous & Tynings-Mullings, 2012) meaning it developed a democratic and justice oriented focus school pedagogically and in how the school was run.

As time passed and the school grew stronger, the number of students at Ms. Jones’ home school began to shrink leading to calls to either move the small school back to its original school, or disband the school all together having students blend into the larger school community. Ms. Jones, a strong union activist, marshaled the defense of the school organizing, teachers, students, parents, and community partners. So far it has worked, the school has survived but she is unsure for how long.

Tension, Weariness, Frustration, and Surrender

As shown in the data, each participant saw teaching as a political act (Apple, 2006) not just as something that takes place within their classroom. All four teachers described organizing and protest as forms of teaching, with three comfortable actually doing it, and Ms. Jules more interested in teaching by itself, than actively participating in protest outside of school. However, all spoke of exhaustion, dark moments, and how long this type of work was sustainable. There was a weariness embedded in each interview, not just an exhaustion that had grown over time, but a build up of tension and frustration that was headed toward a breaking point. “It wears on you...works at you...” Mr. Torres had said, the constant friction and grinding of going against the grain of what was assigned and expected by the school and district. There was a fear and tension in, as Ms. Cruz said, “waiting for the ax to fall.” She continued, “I’m a good person...I want to do what’s right...and I am...it just...it’s not honored...it’s so hard...I just want to surrender...”

It had become a way of life for them; the teacher and the struggle to teach were combined, made of interlocking parts. The teachers expressed concern about the existence they had constructed for themselves. All shared they had thought often of leaving teaching, but were unsure what would be next if they did. Mr. Torres described this process as “breaking up with the love of your life because the relationship is toxic no matter how much you love one another.” As of the writing of this paper, much has changed. Mr. Torres applied to and was accepted into a graduate program in education studies and has left teaching. Ms. Cruz, heavily pursued by a high achieving magnet program for years, finally accepted their offer and left a large urban school and began teaching in the stability of an elite magnet program. Ms. Jones has moved from her small school to a larger community school explaining, “the constant struggle for survival was exhausting, and I needed a bigger pond.” Ms. Jules alone remains at her school and has no set plans to leave.

This raises the complications of sustainability. All four teachers displayed passion, dedication, knowledge, and success in both engaging a justice-oriented pedagogy and in protecting it. Ms. Jules and Ms. Jones engaged in projects that they could largely control. Ms. Jules worked on her pedagogy and teaching, developed a working relationship with an ELA teacher and developed a Y-PAR project (Big Project) that existed largely outside the realm of someone else’s direct control. Ms. Jones worked on her teaching and pedagogy, worked within the department and within outside activist organizations, all largely within her control. Ms. Cruz and Mr. Torres both ventured outside their classrooms and own activism to develop programs that relied upon school leadership that allowed their ventures to exist. Ms. Cruz developed an Ethnic Studies 9th grade program and was hoping to create an advanced elective ethnic studies course. She spent time writing curriculum, connecting it to district regulations, went through the arduous semester-long district approval process, recruited students (which was quite easy), only to have the course canceled over the summer. Ms. Cruz was told only

weeks prior the beginning of the school year that she would be teaching AP United States History rather than her advanced ethnic studies course. “When he [the principal] told me I just heard something break...I knew that was it...” She moved to the magnet program the following year.

Mr. Torres had a similar story. His male youth empowerment organization had moved from a before and after school project to one the principal had agreed to give Mr. Torres a class period for it. That lasted one year. Similar to Ms. Cruz, Mr. Torres found out about the change the week prior to school. “When I found out it was like everything was tainted...it had all been burned and scabbed over. All the work and struggle...I guess I realized how tired I had become,” he said. He contacted schools that had attempted to recruit him before and seriously considered two offers. In the end, “I couldn’t abandon the young men...we had struggled through so much,” he said. So, he stayed one more year, had the chance to say goodbye to the young men and, only then, transitioned to graduate school. The tragic message seems to be that if you teach for social justice and keep your head down, you can sustain. If the teacher reaches beyond their control, they may be broken. Teachers aren’t driven out by direct confrontation, but by exhaustion built up over years of frustration.

In many ways the teaching and how these four teachers struggled to protect and extend it encapsulate Ross’s (2016) notion of dangerous citizenship. Though Ross is specifically using the term to describe how social studies teachers ought to teach students, *to become* dangerous citizens, the concept works equally well to describe how Ms. Cruz, Mr. Torres, Ms. Jules, and Ms. Jones engaged in both the development of their pedagogy and its protection and expansion. Dangerous citizenship calls for a reimagining of teachers’ roles through the pursuit of creating meaningful ways for students to “develop understandings of the world” (Ross, 2016, p. 8). It involves risk and engaging “certain necessary dangers” and involves more than “voting and signing petitions” (Ross, 2016, p. 8). It is, in essence, dangerous not only to the participants but to the hierarchical power structures.

Dangerous citizenship involves risk and is rife with difficulty. It asks already vulnerable and pressured teachers to “re-imagine our roles as teachers and find ways to create opportunities for students to create meaningful personal understandings of the world” (Ross, 2016, p. 8). The danger, Ross argues, goes both ways. It is dangerous for the individual or individuals engaging in it and to the system in which the resistance occurs. Dangerous citizenship assumes that the teachers will be troublemakers, renegades (Author, 2016), and will work to creatively maladjust to an unjust system (Kohl, 1995). Just as the four teachers outlined in this paper did, Ross argues there is no need to wait for “the revolution”, “better colleagues”, or “a more a supportive environment” (Ross, 2015, p. 13). The time for change is now.

There is no one right way to engage in dangerous citizenship because it is contextually bound by individual strengths and circumstances. As the teacher grows and the circumstance grows, so do the tactics, and likely the solitary nature of the work. All four teachers, Ms. Cruz, Mr. Torres, Ms. Jules, and Ms. Jones, initially practiced “camouflage teaching” (Picower, 2011) where their pedagogical disruptions were hidden in silences, within standards, and behind closed doors. It was how they became strong, learned how to describe what they were doing, and grew stronger in their teaching. Through opportunity, invitation, necessity, and possibility their individual efforts grew into collective efforts and energy. They grew beyond themselves and proved that it is possible to defend and expand critical justice-oriented teaching.

Conclusion

Though there is a rich and deep literature on the need for critical pedagogy (Shor, 1987, 1992, 1997; Giroux, 1988; Darder, 2002, 2012; McLaren, 1998), social justice education (Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2010; Swalwell, 2013; North, 2009; Emdin, 2016), and educational based activism (Apple, 2013, 1996; Murphy, 1991; Weiner, 2012; Weiner & Compton, 2008), there needs to be more empirical studies that detail not only justice-oriented educators' classroom practices but also descriptions of the steps necessary to extend and defend critical instructional practices outside the classroom. In our current neoliberal education context (Apple, 2006; Harvey, 2005) where organization and resistance is necessary (Giroux, 2011) the stories of teachers and others who are successfully maintaining or gaining traction in the support of their justice-oriented teaching become incredibly important. More stories and more strategies of how it is being done must be surfaced.

Appendix 1

In Defense of Sort

Directions: Please sort the following into what is the best way to defend, maintain, and expand your pedagogy, curriculum, teaching, and assessments?

1. A teacher develops his own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well with his students. It is nontraditional and outside the department norm. There is friction within his department. He is young and considered to be new by other members even though he's been teaching for five years. He keeps silent during department meetings and continues to build his curriculum.
2. A teacher develops his own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well with his students. It is nontraditional and outside the department norm. There is friction within his department. He is young and considered to be new by other members even though he's been teaching for five years. He keeps silent during department meetings and continues to build his curriculum but begins to develop relationships with administration. They seem to understand his teaching and support him, allowing him to take risks
3. A teacher develops her own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well with students. She spoke out a few times within the department, eventually abandoning it as a lost cause. She instead spends time with like-minded colleagues within the department (a few) and others outside the department to continue to grow her curriculum and pedagogy.
4. A teacher develops her own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well for her students. Teaches for years battling back critics both teachers, parents, and administration as well as mandated curriculum and tests. When given the opportunity she, with like minded colleagues creates her own public school that espouses a philosophy on how to educate children that she completely agrees with.
5. A teacher develops his own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well with students. He speaks out in department meetings and runs for the department chair position gaining it in a department upset. He joins several school wide committees and is in charge of understanding and rolling out the common core standards for the department. He argues this allows him to interpret and shape their implementation.
6. A teacher develops her own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well with her students. An organizer and justice oriented advocate prior to teaching she becomes active in the teachers union, developing and strengthening the progressive side of the union. She achieves leadership positions in the teachers union as she teaches making justice oriented academic freedom a more robust and protected issue.
7. A teacher develops her own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well for her students. She becomes active in outside teacher education non-profits that develop curriculum and pedagogy similar to hers and in advocacy groups that push for school change that is in line with her thinking. Her school and school district respect these organizations.
8. A teacher develops his own justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy that works well for his students. It is seen as cutting edge by many and because of this he begins to be invited to speak to organizations outside the school district, within the school district, and in university classrooms. He takes advantage of all of these attempting to spread the word on what he is doing, while garnering support.

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