Seeking Clarity in Murky Waters: Nuances of Equity and Social Justice From a Teacher Perspective

Elaine J. Chan*

Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education, College of Education and Human Sciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, United States

In this study, I examined interactions between an English teacher and her students to illustrate ways in which issues of equity and social justice may play out in nuanced ways in the implementation of school curriculum in a diverse, Midwestern high school. These stories of classroom teacher and student experiences reveal complexities of how equity and social justice might unfold for students, and be understood by a teacher as she works with her students, to build a body of "teacher knowledge" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996) that grows as the teacher gains experience. Examining complexities of "teacher knowledge" as a classroom teacher attempts to acknowledge her students' social and cultural backgrounds while also implementing curriculum that meets requirements established by her school board, offers insight into challenges a teacher might encounter while working with students of diverse backgrounds in a school context.

Keywords: equity, social justice, teacher knowledge, narrative inquiry, student experiences, multicultural education, diversity, classroom research

INTRODUCTION

He stood up and exclaimed, "That's racist! That's racist!"
I asked him, "Did you hear what they were saying?" Then I asked the class, "Can someone summarize the message of the video for Jordan?"
Alicia responded, "She said that sometimes, you talk more casually, like when you're with your friends, and sometimes you, like, use more formal language."
And then, he stormed out of the classroom, and I haven't seen him since...

Nancy, a tenth grade English teacher at Midwest High School, was telling me about one of her student's responses to a video and follow-up discussion about the use of vernacular English that she had shown in class that day. We had fallen into the routine of talking about the morning classes as we ate our lunch together, Nancy at her desk at the front, right-hand side of her classroom, and me at one of the student desks facing the white boards that lined the front of the room. We usually had our computers open, intending to do some last minute class prep or grading of student work, but more often than not, we talked about recent events at school. Sometimes, we puzzled over the unexpected events or responses, such as the one that had unfolded in class that morning.

There are many ways that Nancy's description of the classroom interaction above might raise questions for a teacher. To begin with, *Why did the student respond in this way to the lesson? Did he perceive the curriculum content to be offensive? And if so, what did he disagree with? Were there other factors contributing to his response? Could the same lesson have been presented in a different way? Where did the student go, and would he be coming back?* I began with this vignette to capture some of the uncertainties associated with how issues of equity and social justice might arise and unfold

in class for a teacher when implementing curriculum for students of diverse social and cultural backgrounds in a school context.

Equity, defined as "the quality of being fair and impartial" (Fowler and Fowler, 1995), is examined here as ways in which students' equitable access to resources, including classes, curriculum materials, time needed to engage in school lessons, and financial resources available to support academic success, may be challenged due to circumstances in their lives. Meanwhile, attention to social justice in a school context suggests a commitment to striving, sometimes systemically, for a more equitable distribution of educational resources, for students. This goal is often grounded in the understanding that those with limited access to available resources may be assisted in accessing resources similar to those for whom access was more easily achieved through circumstances in their lives, such that they may be supported in achieving greater academic success.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Through the large, and growing, body of research literature focused on issues of diversity in education, we have gained valuable insights into ways in which students of diverse social and cultural backgrounds may experience schooling (Igoa, 1995; Carger, 1996; Valdes, 1996, 2001; Valenzuela, 2005, 2009; Chan, 2007; He et al., 2007; Olsen, 2008; Cameron, 2012) and ways in which their teachers may experience their work of supporting their students (Igoa, 1995; Paley, 1995, 2000; Cummins et al., 2005; Chan and Ross, 2009; Gatti, 2014). For all students, issues of equity and social justice should be important considerations at the core of their schooling. For many students of diverse backgrounds, issues of equity and social justice often seem to be highlighted or experienced in the form of challenges or obstacles in actively participating or engaging in school curriculum and activities. Academic challenges are often associated with limited proficiency in the language of instruction (Igoa, 1995; Cummins, 2001; Nieto and Bode, 2018), made worse by language policies which discourage the use of their home languages to support language learning (Cummins et al., 2005; Gandara et al., 2010). English language learners (ELLs) in American schools, for example, may have difficulty understanding lessons, completing assignments, and communicating their knowledge to teachers and peers due to their varying levels of proficiency in English (Igoa, 1995; Kouritzin, 1999; Au, 2010; Gandara et al., 2010). Cummins (2001) described how it can take as many as 5–7 years before language learners reach a level of proficiency needed to complete academic tasks with ease in a target language, although they may achieve oral proficiency much sooner. Sleeter and Stillman (2017) acknowledged language challenges as among the recognized dangers of standardizing knowledge in schooling when the student population is becoming increasingly diverse. High stakes testing required at critical transition periods in schooling, such as toward the end of their high school years, may be especially detrimental since ELLs may be hindered from progressing on to higher education due to difficulties in passing standardized tests (Au, 2010).

Students may also have experienced traumatic events before, during, or following immigration and settlement into new communities (Igoa, 1995; Pipher, 2002; Ross and Chan, 2008; Chan and Schlein, 2011). These challenges may be exacerbated by difficulties associated with limited access to financial, familial, social, and psychological support (Pipher, 2002; Ross and Chan, 2008; Chan and Ross, 2009; Chan and Schlein, 2010; Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013). Students sometimes arrive at school still struggling from traumatic departure from their home countries that included war and loss of birth homes, death or injury to family members, or relocation to communities where they do not have family or acquaintances. Even when immigration is planned well in advance and experienced under relatively safe and calm circumstances, changes in responsibilities and expectations for students that are associated with changes in the family's economic circumstances or familial composition following immigration are sometimes enough to create obstacles or distractions in students' ability to focus on schooling. Middle school students featured in Chan and Ross (2009) and Chan and Schlein (2011) studies, for example, elaborated upon how they were expected to assist their parents with the care of younger siblings and with the upkeep of their homes following immigration since both parents needed to work outside the home in order to support the family, whereas they were free to focus on academic pursuits or leisure with friends in China before emigration to Canada; a parent who had previously assumed these responsibilities at home now needed to work outside the home to financially support the family. Moreover, grandparents and extended family members who remained in their home country were no longer available to assist with childcare.

In some situations, where students are identified as having cognitive or language processing difficulties, academic success might be further challenged. Carger (1996) wrote about ways in which Alejandro, an American-born student from a Mexican immigrant family living in the United States, struggled in school due to undiagnosed language processing difficulties that rendered his learning of English more complicated than what others might encounter in the process of acquiring a second language. Alejandro did not receive special education support needed to help him to develop ways of accommodating for language processing issues, and his progress in English language acquisition was further hindered by teachers who attributed his difficulties to laziness and a lack of desire to work hard in order to learn English, rather than a disability in need of professional, specialized support.

While the student featured in Carger (1996) study had special education needs that were overlooked, the opposite also occurs with greater frequency among immigrant and minority students than among mainstream students in North American schools. Harry and Klingner (2014) described how students of minority background are more likely to be over-represented in special education classes; their challenges in school are sometimes mistaken for learning disabilities rather than as difficulties associated with the acquisition of a new language. Furthermore, their parents, without in-depth knowledge about how best to navigate a school system that they did not experience themselves as children, may be at a

loss about how to advocate for their children. Carger (1996) described how Alejandro's parents agreed to have his sister identified as having special education needs although they were not certain that her difficulties were the result of a learning disability, in order for her to be able to access resources in school to assist her with English acquisition. Erroneous diagnoses, of ELLs as a special education students, not only contributes further to the overrepresentation of immigrant and minority students in special education, but also hint at the need for further attention to learning about complexities of educating students of diverse social and cultural backgrounds in school.

Importance of Culturally Sensitive and Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Pedagogy

There are many ways in which school practices and curriculum in the host community differ so significantly from those of the home culture and society of many immigrant and minority students that the transition from home to school each day may be jarring (Li, 2002, 2005; Valenzuela, 2005, 2009), sometimes to the extent of being perceived as 'ruptures' (Hamman and Zuniga, 2011). It is not uncommon for immigrant and minority students to feel a sense of disconnect because differences in values and expectations between home and school (Kalantzis and Cope, 1992; Paley, 1995, 2000; Cummins et al., 2005; Chan, 2007; He et al., 2007; Gay, 2018) are so marked.

Given these differences, feelings of isolation might develop among newcomer students, especially when there are few others who speak their home language or who share their home culture. Feelings of isolation may be exacerbated by language policies that restrict the use of the maternal language in the school context (Gandara et al., 2010), or that communicate to the students the lack of proficiency in English as a deficit while overlooking language capabilities in the maternal language as an asset (Cummins, 2001), especially when proficiency in the home language is seen as hindering the development of English language skills.

Challenges associated with SES, ability to engage in curriculum content and school activities, and discrimination due to preconceptions about their abilities are among the more obvious ways in which equity and social justice may arise for immigrant and minority students. Olsen (2008) ethnographic study in a public, American high school provided a glimpse into complexities of student life as immigrant students navigated classes and interactions with American-born peers and teachers. Carger (1996) narrative inquiry provided insight into challenges that members of a Mexican American family encountered as they worked to support their child in school with limited financial resources and literacy skills. Lee (1994) work examining the experiences of Asian students in an American high school helped dispel some of the stereotypes of Asian students as 'model minorities' while also highlighting potential difficulties students may encounter due to preconceptions about their behavior and their academic skills. All of these studies address issues that may challenge the ability of students

of immigrant and minority background to engage in school curriculum, and in that way, may be understood in terms of equity and social justice in the planning and enactment of curriculum and school practices pertaining to immigrant and minority students.

Carger (1996) work also offers a glimpse of the potential of narrative inquiry into challenges teachers may encounter as they work to support their students of diverse backgrounds in school. Seiki et al. (2018) outline narrative inquiry as social justice practice, through its attention to details and nuances that may be accessed to reveal complexities not obviously apparent without going beneath the surface. Seiki et al. (2021) explored the use of familial curriculum to assist preservice teachers in moving from theory to practice in the implementation of subject matter curriculum. Grounded in the theory of transformative curriculum making (Seiki, 2016), preservice teachers' histories and familial knowledge were repositioned and valued alongside science learning. By using science curriculum and instruction to cross the border between home and school, the curriculum became more accessible to the students. This narrative inquiry into preservice teachers' work of translating theory into practice in science instruction offered insight into teachers' experiences in relation to equity and social justice.

OBJECTIVES

As described in existing research, students bring with them experiences shaped by the unique circumstances of their own lives. These circumstances, in turn, have the potential to impact on their ability to engage in school curriculum, and to access associated benefits of education in their school context, such that issues of equity and social justice may play out in complex, and sometimes unexpected, ways.

In this study, I examine ways in which ideas of equity and social justice may play out in nuanced ways for a Midwestern, high school English teacher in her diverse, high needs school. I consider ways in which issues of equity and social justice might unfold for students in the implementation of school curriculum at the secondary level. Examples of equity and social justice from interactions between a teacher and her students reveal further complexities of how these issues might be understood and addressed by a teacher as she attempts to acknowledge her students' social and cultural backgrounds in her curriculum while also implementing curriculum to meet academic standards established by her school board. Examining these complexities of "teacher knowledge" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996) offer insight into challenges teachers might encounter in working with students of diverse backgrounds in a school context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

I referred to Dewey (1938) notion of the dialectic between personal and social as a framework for considering tensions

between personal and professional responsibilities experienced by teachers who work with students in diverse school contexts. Dewey (1938) philosophy of education as being inextricably intertwined with life experience reinforced the importance of the role of experience within and beyond school in contributing to shaping the school experiences of the students, and the professional knowledge of their teachers.

I examine here the intersections of student and teacher experiences on a diverse school landscape to explore complexities surrounding notions of equity and social justice in a school context. Equity and social justice, as ideas guiding education for a highly diverse student population, are terms that may be grounded in underlying notions about public education in a democratic society (Sizer, 1992). General commitment to ideas of equity and social justice are not uncommon among educators in a North American context, and the idea of educators striving for equity of access for their students may even be considered among the "sacred stories" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996) of the profession. Indeed, architect of the common school, Horace Mann, once described school as "the great equalizer" (Steinberg, 2001), while acknowledging challenges associated with this ideal of equitable access to education by students. This commitment to equity in schooling may even be viewed as a foundation on which public education is based. Along these lines, ideas about how we might move toward more equitable and socially-just school curriculum and practices seem to be offered sometimes without deep discussion or deliberation about what these notions mean. More specifically, questions linger about how ideas might translate into practice, or how they might be experienced by teachers who are typically responsible for implementing school-based practices and classroom curriculum (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Craig and Ross, 2008), or how they might be experienced by the students for whom they were intended. The struggle to identify and define equity among the many practices and programs initiated and supported in school remains difficult; definitive plans about how best to accomplish equity and social justice in practices and teaching are even more elusive.

For these reasons, the idea of equity and social justice pertaining to students of minority background may be among the grand narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) often referred to in describing schooling to which many schools in North American communities claim to adhere. Closer examination of the complexities of student circumstances, as they intersect with professional responsibilities of teachers reveals challenges of aspiring to create equitable and socially just school communities, some of which seem inherent in the implementation or enactment of curriculum when attempting to engage large numbers of students from vastly different backgrounds who are likely striving for very different goals. As such, the enactment of practices and curriculum grounded in ideas about equity and social justice in a school context is rife with tensions, by virtue of the differing ideas about how these ideas should play out in a school context despite the passion that often drives a commitment to these ideas. These tensions become all the more apparent when students' vastly different experiences also need to be taken into consideration.

METHODOLOGY: LEARNING ABOUT NANCY'S EXPERIENCES AT MIDWEST HIGH SCHOOL USING A NARRATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

In this study, nuances of complexities in the experiences of a teacher learning about the experiences of her students were uncovered through in-depth, long-term observation to uncover "life in classrooms" in the way Jackson (1990) modeled in his school-based research. I used a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, 2000; Clandinin, 2013) to learn about Nancy's experiences as an English teacher at Midwest High. This study was embedded into a larger study addressing the intersections of culture and curriculum in a school context. Given my interest in learning more about complexities of acknowledging the social and cultural diversity of students in the implementation of school curriculum and teaching practices from a beginning teacher perspective, I focused on Nancy's "stories of experience" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) as she worked to acknowledge the diversity of her students while also meeting school board guidelines for the acquisition of content area material. The stories presented here capture some of the nuances and highlight potential challenges to implementing ideas about equity and social justice in a classroom context.

I took part in Nancy's classes as a long-term participant observer, and conducted interviews and follow-up conversations with Nancy about details of her classes and her interactions with her students. I, along with two research assistants, participated in each of Nancy's four English 10 classes, three times a week, from the beginning of the school year in August until the end of the school year in May. We observed Nancy in class with her students on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and attended student events (e.g., sports night, music performances, student assemblies, Fall Festival, . . .) throughout the year to learn about their school lives. I regularly discussed details of her classes as we ate lunch together each day that I spent in her classroom.

I audio–recorded two 30 to 45–min, semi-structured interviews with Nancy about her lessons, teaching materials, enactment of her English curriculum, and school-based and out-of-school events as they pertained to her students, and professional development events in which she had participated. I also discussed with Nancy her ideas and experiences of cultural diversity in twice-weekly conversational interviews throughout the year as issues arose in class, in interactions with her students and colleagues, and at events in the school community. I focused on complexities of curricular decisions, presenting them as instances of "hovering between passion and responsibility" as Nancy balanced a commitment to providing academic instruction to prepare for graduation and for standardized, state-wide literacy testing, with professional goals to support students in ways she believed would help to instill a passion for learning within and beyond school.

I recorded data in the form of: detailed fieldnotes from class observations, conversational interviews, and interactions with teachers and their students; interview transcripts; and researcher journal entries. I composed detailed fieldnotes following each school visit and classroom observation. I used a two-column format described in Clandinin and Connelly (2000) whereby details of observations, interviews and conversations were recorded on the left-hand side and questions, interpretations, and themes to help guide future interactions with Nancy and her students were indicated in the right-hand column. I also collected artifacts, including class schedules, samples of student work, teaching materials and curricula, and flyers and pamphlets as documents contextualizing school programs and practices aimed at supporting diverse students and their families. All data were filed into a research archive.

Learning About Nancy's Experiences at Midwest High

"Stories of experience" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) from the fieldnotes, interview and conversation notes, and artifacts gathered from school were set into the temporal, spatial, and social-personal dimensions (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of Midwest High during the 2013–2014 school year. I organized the stories of experience according to themes as they became apparent through analysis of fieldnotes, and during weekly research project meetings, and ongoing discussion about school events.

Midwest High School is known locally to be among the most socially and culturally diverse high schools in the district, and where generations of the same family are among its alumni. Among the 2,528 students, 49 birth countries, and 42 home languages are represented, and 313 were identified as ELL students. The school boasts a wide range of academic programs, ranging from special education, differentiated and AP courses in Math, English, and Sciences, an IB program, and a wide selection of international languages, to champion athletic teams, active school council, school newspaper and yearbook clubs, orchestra, and award-winning dance and slam poetry groups. Nancy's students participated in varsity football, basketball, dance troupe, track and field, talent nights, and culture clubs representing different ethnic groups in the school, to name a few. The availability of programs to meet the wide range of academic and social needs and interests of the students reinforce the community reputation, at least on the surface, as a school where differences are accepted.

As I spent time learning about the teachers' and students' experience in Midwest High, I kept in mind the following questions to guide my interactions with my participants – *What does it mean for a school to be equitable and socially just in the development, implementation, and assessment of curriculum and classroom practices? To what extent do teachers' and their students' experiences suggest that curriculum and school practices support the social and cultural diversity in the school community? In what ways might decisions, such as those made in the spur of the moment during class lessons, reflect school practices and offer insight into ways in which issues of equity and social justice might unfold in the enactment of curriculum in this secondary school context? Is a school community that strives to be accepting of diversity also striving to be equitable and socially just?* I referred to these questions in my fieldnotes written after school visits and interactions with participants.

All data, including detailed fieldnotes from class observations, interviews, and interactions with teachers and their students, interview transcripts, and researcher journal entries were examined numerous times to identify common narrative themes, and then organized by theme using a color coding system. I used Clandinin and Connelly (2000) metaphor of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a framework for drawing out contextual, interactional and temporal meaning of "stories of experience" from among the common themes.

The thematic and contextual analysis of common narrative themes uncovered in this study provide a lens for examining diversity in schools as interactive and generative. Schlein and Chan (2013) advocate for the use of this lens to explore multicultural education through story for analyzing diversity in school contexts.

This lens is grounded in Clandinin (1986) curricular lens of "teachers' images in action" that sees teachers as the primary curriculum agents whose images of teaching shape and are shaped by the act of teaching, as *multicultural education-in-action,* and expanded from Phillion (2002) use of the term "narrative multiculturalism" This lens was fashioned within Schlein and Chan (2013) examination of administrative narratives to underscore how multicultural education might be created through both story and experience, in ways that might be facilitated by administrators as lead teachers and building leaders.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: NUANCES OF EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NANCY'S CLASSROOM

The diversity of the student population at Midwest High provided a forum through which issues of identity, culture, and ethnicity could develop, and increased the potential for opportunities for students to interact with peers from various ethnic, racial, social, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Interactions in school between Nancy and her students, and among her students, revealed countless nuances in how issues of equity and social justice might unfold in a classroom and school context. I present here stories from classroom observations, and conversations and interactions with Nancy to explore how issues of equity and social justice arose in the implementation of curriculum in her tenth grade English class.

I kept in mind Clandinin and Connelly (2000) metaphor of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a framework for considering contextual, interactional and temporal meaning of "stories of experience" from among the themes identified in the stories. While each of the stories was set into the spatial context of Midwest High School, and more specifically, in Nancy's English 10 classroom, I was struck by ways in which temporal and interactional details of the stories began, or were impacted by, events and circumstances beyond the school and classroom.

Curriculum Tensions: Potential of Curriculum to Engage and to Dismiss Students

I documented Nancy's curricular experiences as she attempted to acknowledge the diversity of languages and cultures that her students brought to class, while also supporting them to meet academic milestones, such as preparing them for the upcoming WGDE testing[1] (LPS reference) required in order for students to graduate from high school.

Jordan in English Class

On the day in which the incident presented in the introductory vignette unfolded, Nancy had just finished showing a video about the use of vernacular language and was beginning a discussion about ideas from the video when Jordan stormed out of the classroom after an angry outburst. That day at lunch, Nancy described what had unfolded in class, both of us raising questions in an attempt to better understand what had contributed to his response. Nancy began by summarizing the video she had selected consisting of a narrator-led introduction about the use of vernacular language, accompanied with upbeat scenes of teens interacting in a variety of contexts, from crowded school hallways and scenes of family mealtimes, to neighborhood stores and community settings, to more formal settings such a job interviews or classroom contexts. The narrator then described situations in which vernacular language might be appropriate and when standard English could be used. Some of the youth featured in the video were African American and others were of Caucasian, Hispanic, or Asian backgrounds. As the video ended, Nancy asked the students what they thought of the video, and whether or not they agreed with the messages conveyed. She explained to me how she had asked questions with the intention of engaging students in a discussion about their ideas about the use of vernacular language, hoping to have them share experiences and discuss possible nuances in the topic. Jordan's response that the message had been racist had been surprising to Nancy. She thought that the topic had been presented in an age-appropriate manner when she had previewed it prior to showing it in class, and that the ideas and perspectives featured in the video would be ones that her own students might relate to. In talking about her work of planning the lesson, selecting materials, and identifying discussion questions as a follow-up activity, Nancy described how she had hoped that the students would raise interesting tensions about ideas presented in the video, and perhaps refer to their own experiences, whether in support of or in opposition to ideas presented in the video.

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[1]WRITING GRADUATION DEMONSTRATION EXAM (WGDE)

"For the writing demonstration, students . . . must show writing and editing skills. To meet the writing requirement, students may

- Pass the Writing Graduation Demonstration Exam (WGDE), or
- Complete designated writing assignments at a satisfactory level in the Composition Course, or
- Score at a satisfactory level on WGDE retest in English 11."

(Reference: https://www.lps.org/post/index.cfm?collection=50).

Of students in Nancy's English 10 classes, approximately 1/4 to 1/3 were African American, depending on the class; some had recently immigrated from African countries while others were from families who had been in the United States for generations, as well as students whose families were originally from Mexico, Argentina, Spain, Puerto Rico, Vietnam, India, Myanmar, or Indigenous backgrounds, depending on the section. Nancy explained that she had selected the video because she thought the topic would be a positive way to recognize diverse languages and dialects spoken among the students, while also helping provide students with knowledge that might be practical for a job search. She hoped the video might also provide a way to raise ideas for discussion, and be helpful for students as they learn to navigate a diverse school and community context.

As we discussed the incident, we also acknowledged that there might be other factors in Jordan's life in and outside of school might have contributed to his abrupt departure from class that day. In the weeks prior to the video and discussion in class about vernacular language, he had been asked to attend a number of meetings with school guidance counselors due to truancy, and incomplete classwork. I remembered that from the beginning of the school year, Nancy noted to me that Jordan's work was rarely done; not only did he rarely complete work that was assigned during class time, but his homework was not usually completed either. I knew that Nancy sometimes assigned questions and short writing assignments for the students to complete in class following a shared or assigned reading, and that during these work periods, the students usually worked independently at their desks. Given that the classroom was arranged in rows of single desks facing the front, with the space between rows large enough that the students would not be able to talk easily even with a classmate sitting in the row next to them, I asked Nancy what Jordan did during these work periods if he did not work. The students had recently done a work period like this following a viewing of a video of 'Fahrenheit 451' from the 1960's, and I noticed that most students worked quietly at their desks. Nancy responded that during the previous work period, and sometimes during class, Jordan put this head down on his desk on to his folded arms, and rested. Jordan did not submit his page of questions, as she had asked the students to do as they left the classroom. When she went around tidying up the room before the next group of students arrived, she saw that his page was blank when she picked it up off his desk; he had not even written his name on the page.

During the 2–3 weeks previous to this day in class, Nancy had been preparing to submit grades for report cards to be sent home. Nearly every day in class, at the beginning and sometimes at the end of class as well, she reminded her students to submit outstanding assignments. She identified a block of time after school many days of the week when students could go to her classroom to work on assignments. One day during a work period, she individually called each student up to the front of the class where she sat on a stool, and showed them their grades on a table. She pointed out how she had calculated their overall grade from points accumulated from work completed during the term, effectively

also showing them in the process whether or not they had assignments that still needed to be completed. In addition, she spoke individually with students who were missing multiple assignments, and asked them to come to her class after school to complete the work.

Jordan was among those students who were informed that they had outstanding assignments. Some students asked questions about when they could complete the work, and told Nancy that they would hurry to complete their assignments. Some of the students went to Nancy's classroom after school during the available work periods to complete their assignments. Jordan did not ask questions about the unfinished assignments, nor did he hurry to complete them. He did not initially attend the after-school work sessions either; it was not until Nancy told him directly that he needed to come to her classroom, along with a handful of other students who had a number of missing assignments, that he attended one day. Nancy explained that she had told him at the time that she would continue to ask him to attend these after-school sessions until all of his assignments had been completed before he would be absolved of this responsibility. She described how Jordan completed the work quickly that day, and then left class. When Nancy picked the work off the desk after he had left, she saw that it had been done well – he did not get all of the answers correct, nor did he seem especially interested in the work while he was doing it, but the work was done without much struggle or complaint and most of the answers were correct. More specifically, he responded to the questions in a way that illustrated understanding of the lesson and the responses had been written in grammatically correct sentences without spelling or significant punctuation difficulties. In fact, the quality was better than that of many students who had completed the work in class. Moreover, it had not taken Jordan long to complete the work. Nancy added that she had not known how her request for him to come to her classroom to complete his assignments would go over, since the repercussions of refusing to abide by her request were minimal. He did not seem to be bothered if he was given a detention, and according to colleagues who had given detentions, Jordan often did not attend them even if he had been told he had a detention. She asked him to come in again to complete to rest of the missing work, but Jordan did not come in again.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS VS. THINKING WITH STORIES

Attempting to Understand Jordan's Response

Jordan's response to the video was surprising for his teacher and his classmates in many ways because it was unexpected. An outburst followed by an angry departure is not the usual, or anticipated, response to curricular materials presented in a high school English class, nor is it an expected response to a video message about contexts for the use of vernacular and standard English.

The message of the video did not seem out of line from Nancy's perspective, given her intentions. Nancy elaborated upon her goals for the lesson for the materials and discussion that day, describing her intention to help students to gain knowledge that might be helpful in navigating a societal context where many of the students would be seeking employment in the near future. She believed that having an understanding of situations and contexts in which different levels of formality in speaking different kinds of English might be practical. In addition, she wanted to orient students to recognize and to appreciate diverse ways of communicating while also acknowledging that different levels of formality in language use might be expected of them in some contexts. She believed that the ability to recognize and to use more formal language is a skill that is important for all students, regardless of whether or not they use Black vernacular speech, or not. For example, students might be expected to use less casual language in a job or classroom context than they might use in their homes or when interacting with friends or peers.

Given these intentions, Jordan's response was unexpected from Nancy's perspective. As we unpacked the lesson and ensuing response, we wondered, would Jordan have responded similarly on another day? Did he find the content offensive? Or uninteresting? Were there other students in her other English 10 class who had similar responses to the materials but refrained from saying anything? Would the materials have been received differently with another group of students? On another day? With a different teacher? With an African American teacher? In a discussion with other African American students? We had so many questions that could not be easily addressed or answered in the moments following his departure from class.

Building Connections With Peers and Teachers in School: Finding Ways to Connect Across Landscapes of Difference

Cameron (2012) wrote about ways in which students' engagement in school reflected the extent to which they believed that others in their school context, namely their teachers, supported and liked them. Similarly, Clandinin et al. (2013) and Kuo (2017) featured students in their work who found it difficult to engage in school when they did not feel connected in meaningful ways to peers or teachers who appreciated their values.

I wondered about the extent to which Jordan felt comfortable and welcome in school. Did he feel liked and supported by his friends and his teachers? Was it a place he felt a sense a belonging? Did he believe he had a right to be there? Did he enjoy spending time there? These questions seem trite in that we might expect that all students desire these traits from others in their school community, but there is research to support the notion that many high school students do not feel that their school environment would be described in these ways. Jackson (1990), for example, asserted that schools may be a more supportive learning context for students whose understanding of school is in line with that of their teachers

and administrators. I wondered about the extent to which Jordan felt supported at Midwest High, and about the extent to which he perceived the time spent and materials presented in school to be of interest to him and to be helpful for his future. Nancy described how, since the beginning of the school year, she struggled to get Jordan to complete classwork and homework. During days when I was in class, Jordan sometimes arrived late, and he rarely participated in discussions about materials that were being read in class as a group. He did not seem to stand out in class, with the exception of a couple of occasions when he did not comply with Nancy's instructions to complete work during class and instead talked with students seated nearby. These kinds of interruptions were common in class, and therefore, did not draw much attention from his classmates.

Nancy described Jordan as a puzzle. We did not know much about him, and he did not seem interested in talking much or in completing English assignments. He had a few friends in class but did not seem motivated to attend class in order to see them. Instead, he spent a good part of the class with his head on his desk, sometimes with a headset on, and other times with his eyes closed. I do not remember ever seeing him raise his hand to answer questions or to contribute to a class discussion during days when I was in class.

Some researchers focus more specifically on challenges that Black, male students may encounter in school, describing tensions as the result of the notable difference in expectations for behavior and values between how students see themselves in and out of school. Laura (2014) outlined ways in which schooling practices and policies experienced by her younger brother might be described as a breakdown in social justice for a student at risk of leaving school early and becoming negatively involved with the law. Fine (1991) went so far as to describe policies and practices in school as being so unsupportive of some students that the students might be described as 'push-outs' rather than 'dropouts.' Laura (2014) referred to the notion of a 'school-to-prison' pipeline for students such as her brother whose 'bad kid' reputation in school contributed to repeated punishments associated with zero tolerance policies in school and later becoming a 'person of interest' by police as a teen. Chan and Ross (2014) examined experiences of a school equity policy from the perspective of a student, his teachers and administrators, and his parents. They highlighted how a policy, specifically the 'Safe Schools Policy' (Toronto District School Board, 1999) that was intended to enhance equity of access to resources to all students in the school and reinforce a sense of safety in school, seemed to be more likely to negatively impact upon students of some racial or culture groups than those of other groups. Chan et al. (2015) addressed complexities associated with building relationships with students of diverse social and cultural backgrounds in order to engage them in school curriculum, in their study focused on examining nuances of building a culturally-sensitive curriculum from the perspective of a beginning teacher. They described challenges in building and sustaining supportive practices when there was so much potential for differences in opinion and ideas, even when practices were driven by good intentions. In addition to the potential for decisions about actions taken at the

school level impacting upon students' subsequent participation in school, issues of professional identity also became apparent when differences in perspective were revealed in face of tensions arising from differences in the way in which policies and practices were enacted. These studies highlighted complexities in the implementation of an equity policy at the school level.

Further challenges also contributed to difficulties experienced by some students. Delpit (1995) elaborated upon tensions that might arise when students come to school with experiences that are so significantly different from those of some of their teachers that finding a common ground may involve conflict and a need for a shift in perspective. Kozol (2012) documented some of the 'savage inequities' within and outside of school that might contribute to shaping students' ability to adapt and succeed in school. Chan et al. (2015) study examining complexities of building a culturally-sensitive curriculum revealed nuances in building relationships with students of diverse social and cultural backgrounds in order to engage them in school curriculum. Ladson-Billings (2006) provided insight into ways in which structural inequities in access to schooling for African American students continued long after segregation ended; she described ways in which access was hindered to the extent that it would be more appropriate to describe the difference in academic performance of African American students as an 'education debt' rather than an 'achievement gap,' as it has often been referred.

In many of these instances, researchers refer to and describe some of the added challenges encountered by Black, male teens in American schools, and ways in which existing statistics might contribute to an increased likelihood of students leaving school before the completion of a high school diploma. In the interaction presented at the beginning of this paper, Jordan fell into the description of a male, Black student who was not productively engaged in school work, and following the incident featured in the introduction, did not return to school.

From an equity and social justice stance, statistics about lower graduation rates and the academic success of students of diverse backgrounds, when compared to that of their White peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006), raise questions about the extent to which we have gathered sufficient information about their experience in school or developed appropriate ways to better prepare and support continued learning for educators (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001), and teacher educators, in order to enhance equity and access of educational resources for students at risk of early school leaving. When reflecting upon what was known about Jordan at Midwest High, so many questions arose that it became obvious that we needed more information about how to better engage him in school learning as a way of improving upon his school experiences.

Further information about Jordan's experiences prior to and while attending Midwest High is needed to inform our understanding of the impact of interactions with teachers and other students, and the extent to which appropriate curriculum and teaching practices are needed. More information would help teachers and other school staff to support students like

Jordan who, based upon irregular school attendance and seeming low level of interest in curriculum material and school activities, may be at risk of leaving school before graduation. Details of what we know thus far about Jordan and about Nancy's experiences at Midwest High suggest complexities that raise further questions, however. We could make assumptions about Jordan from the vignette and associated descriptions of Jordan in class but to what extent do they represent Jordan accurately?

Midwest High is a diverse, public high school that included many Black students among their student population. Black students were accordingly represented in Nancy's English 10 classes. While some of the students struggled academically or were among those who did not actively participate in class or in extra-curricular programs, there were also many who performed well on academic assessments across their school subjects and were actively engaged in the school community, whether in the form of athletic teams, yearbook, student government, concert band or orchestra, or any number of the many school-sponsored activities available to students. Questions about how teachers and school staff might engage students like Jordan, who did not seem especially interested in school life at Midwest High, remain, highlighting further the need for better understanding about students' ideas about their school experiences.

For example, while Jordan's response to the video and discussion following the viewing of the video seemed 'angry' and I had described him as having 'stormed' out of the classroom, it is also important to acknowledge that this description was made without knowledge of reasons for his response. As an observer in the classroom that morning, even with Nancy's knowledge of Jordan's participation in school from previous conversations with his guidance counselor and from her regularly-scheduled teacher meetings with colleagues who also taught the same group of students as a way of keeping one another updated as to developments in the students' attendance and participation in school, we did not feel we knew enough about him to be optimally helpful and supportive. We did not know what might have contributed to his response to the video, or nuances of what it means to speak African American vernacular English (AAVE) referred to as "the intimate sounds and gestures... normally saved for family and loved ones" (Hooks, 1994, p. 147), within the community. As I reflect upon this vignette, it is possible that he took offense to having his language discussed -even deliberated- among peers, many of whom do not speak AAVE and who are not a part of this community. It is possible that there were other events in his life around that time that also impacted upon his ability to attend to school and related academic tasks, since he did not return to school shortly after this interaction. So much of Jordan's experiences was unknown, and Nancy and I questioned our ability to make sense of the interaction without more information, yet we found ourselves wanting to better understand factors contributing to Jordan's response to the lesson. We can, nonetheless, conclude that the incident highlighted the extent to which one incident has many interpretations and many perspectives. It is so unsettling to acknowledge that we did not know enough about how

best to support Jordan, and that his departure from school that day still haunts us, for these reasons. It is, at least in part, the reason for which I am now writing about this incident.

The stance of "thinking with stories" (Morris, 2002) may be a way to shift the focus to include a wider range of interpretation of experiences and influences that teachers and students might bring. Estefan et al. (2016) describe the potential of this stance in shaping interpretation and understanding of experiences in ways differently than what one might initially come to, without opportunities to share and deliberate the meaning and impact of experiences of others. In this study, it would have been helpful to follow up with this response by speaking with Nancy, Jordan, his classmates, his guidance counselors, and his other teachers to learn about ways in which their own experiences might have contributed to shaping their understanding and interpretation of Jordan's response in class and his participation in school. It might also have been helpful to talk with others in the school to learn more about common practices and policies, to learn more about specific details of Jordan's participation in school until that day in class.

I chose, however, to present this incident from the stance of a classroom teacher who has limited access to information about her students' lives outside of her classroom, since this is a common stance from which many teachers work with their students. Although some students have a history of documented interactions, detailed, adapted education plans dating back from earlier in their school careers, and teachers and counselors with previous experience with the students in school, many, such as Jordan, do not. Given that many classroom teachers are left to make the best with limited information about their students at their disposal, it was important to examine nuances of equity and social justice from this stance of classroom teacher. This stance, however, contributed to an incomplete, at best, and likely, a skewed interpretation of Jordan's engagement in class, while a process of 'thinking with stories' would likely have included a wider range of possible interpretations and understandings of Jordan's experiences in school. The incident reinforces ideas about ways in which issues of equity and social justice are exceedingly complex.

Further Complexities of Equity and Social Justice From Student Experiences of School

Other interactions in Nancy's English 10 classes offered further insight into the nuances of ideas pertaining to social justice and equity in a school context. Reflection upon Nancy's decisions about the design and implementation of curriculum in her English 10 classes and tensions she experienced about how she might engage her students in subject matter learning revealed complexities, highlighting not only thought provoking points about the curriculum content but also about her students' responses to curriculum assignments. For example, in the enactment of curriculum, there arose instances when professional tensions arose about how best to manage class time in order

to maximize learning of subject matter content within tight time constraints.

Inequity of Access Due to Limited Proficiency in Target Language

During the same term, a few weeks prior to the incident described at the beginning of this piece, other examples where Nancy felt torn about the implementation of her curriculum also unfolded. These incidents might be interpreted as examples where equity and social justice were factors impacting upon students' access to the curriculum. Jordan's classmates, Denpo, whose family immigrated from Myanmar 3 years previously, and Minh, whose family had been in Lincoln for just 2 years, respectively, had both achieved sufficient proficiency in English that they no longer needed language support in the form of a separate English-learner class in school, but had not yet achieved sufficient proficiency to be able to write about and express more abstract ideas with ease or confidence. I was reminded of the complexities of the path toward English language proficiency as I helped Minh work on a poster outlining dangers of cigarette smoking. He included a written piece about how his father continued to smoke although he had told him of these dangers, and nodded gravely when I asked whether he worried about his health. Nancy had praised his hard work and diligence in achieving significant progress in learning English, especially given the short amount of time since his arrival in the United States but from interacting with him as he worked, it was also clear that he had a sense of how much further he had to go, given his frustration in communicating his ideas when he spoke in English. On another day, I was struck by the realization of the importance of freedom of speech for Denpo when he contrasted his freedom to say and write about political initiatives regardless of whether or not he was in support of them while in the United States when compared to what was permitted in his country of birth. I had initially attempted to steer him toward one of the other themes that had been listed as possible topics for the written component at the bottom of the page, not understanding that his choice to write about freedom of speech in the United States was borne of his own experiences living in a place where his family members did not have the same freedom to do so.

There were other ways in which details about the students' lives provided a glimpse of tensions associated with advocating for equity and social justice when these terms are wrought with uncertainty about how they are understood in a school context even as they had significant implications in the out-of-school lives of the students. Issues of equity and social justice may be obvious for James, who wore a thin hoodie without a coat to school despite freezing winter temperatures, for example, but associated complexities become more apparent when teachers realized the extent to which he was adamant about not accepting a coat from the school, despite the fact that these resources had been established specifically to assist students in this regard. Similarly, school attendance is considered critical in supporting academic success, and as such, it would seem to be an obvious example of an equity and social justice

issue if a student were to inform her teacher that she would be missing nearly an entire month of school. When Yara stayed behind following class one afternoon to ask whether Nancy could give her work that would be covered while she was away in Mexico during the month of December, Nancy appreciated Yara's initiative in being a responsible student. Her teacher recognized the value of time spent with family members, surrounded by Mexican culture during the holiday season but also expressed that missing a month of classes was a lot of material even if she was completing work while she was away. Issues of access to an equitable school context also arose with other students, in different ways as well.

Tom: 'Why Do People Think That All Asian People Are the Same?'

One day, Nancy referred to an incident that had occurred the previous afternoon, just as she finished taking attendance and was about to begin the lesson. She described how she had been torn for a moment about how best to respond to her student, Tom, when he exclaimed, 'Why do people think that all Asian people are the same?' In a school such as Midwest High with so much social and cultural diversity within the student population, where students take classes with others from a wide range of cultural, social, language, religious, SES, and ethnic backgrounds, addressing Tom's question might have yielded interesting insights of relevance to many of the students. But in that moment, rather than delving into a potentially thorny discussion about racial identity, discrimination, and stereotypes, although Nancy believed that her students would benefit from a discussion about complexities of diversity, she instead felt pressure to fulfill teaching responsibilities by using her limited instructional time to focus on preparation for testing. At a time when high stakes standardized testing was scheduled within a mere few weeks away, Nancy was committed to completing a final round of writing prompts in preparation for their upcoming WGDE testing that was required for high school graduation. She could not spare the instruction time. These moments might be interpreted as instances when Nancy was torn between the passion of wanting to cultivate her classroom as a community where learning included opportunities to support students in their development as culturally sensitive classmates and future members of an increasingly diverse society. At the same time, she also felt the pressure to responsibly prepare her students for high-stakes testing that would determine whether or not they would be able to graduate from high school and proceed to higher education. The tensions experienced as she attempted to balance recognition of the importance of engaging her students in curriculum that acknowledges the complexities of their lives outside of school while also striving to fulfill her professional responsibility to prepare them for standardized testing might be understood as hovering between passion and responsibility.

I wondered about the reason behind Tom's question, asked with seeming irritation. There is a large body of existing literature debunking the notion of the model minority that attributes academic success and ease in adapting to various aspects of

North American society to Asian students by nature of their race. Lee (1994) ethnographic study in a diverse high school outlined four distinctly different groups of Asian students within the school community. There were: high-achieving Asian students who studied hard to succeed, some of whom were motivated to integrate into the larger society by connecting with White, American peers; low-achieving Asian students who struggled with English proficiency and remained among their Asian peers; 'new waver' Asian students who 'liked to party,' often skipped class, and did not seem to be motivated by the goal of academic success; and those who struggled significantly in school but resisted seeking assistance in order to avoid bringing shame to their families. Only the first group could be described using the criteria of the 'model minority' stereotype and even within this group there was much variation among the students. These distinctions dispel the notion of a 'model minority' and highlighted the importance of recognizing extreme differences within groups of Asian students in the same way that any other group of students would include students with different goals. Li (2002) ethnographic research examining the experiences of academic and entrepreneurial Chinese families, and Lew (2004) work with Korean American high school dropouts offer a glimpse into challenges that Asian students may encounter as they strive toward school success without the advantage of parental support or prior knowledge of North American school systems, provides further evidence to dispel the notion of a uniform group implied in the label of a 'model minority.' Even from this limited snapshot of research focused on Asian American students, it is obvious there is much variation within this group. Yet from Tom's question in Nancy's English class, the notion of the 'model minority' continues to be perpetuated, even within his diverse high school community where variation among the Asian students would seem to be apparent. Issues of social justice and equity may play out differently for students like Tom but this interaction highlights the need to learn more about students' experiences of the school community.

Joey: 'The Luckiest Person I Know...'

Student experiences were highlighted in preparations for standardized testing on other occasions as well. Nancy and I reflected upon issues that arose during writing conferences that were conducted with students individually, to discuss their responses to writing prompts completed for test preparation. On this day, students were asked to write about "the luckiest person you know, and why." Following grading of the responses, we met individually with the students to encourage them to elaborate upon details of their stories as a way of enriching their writing.

Nancy spoke about how Joey, from her sixth period afternoon class, had written about his girlfriend, who he believed to be the luckiest person he knew, because she had a home in which she lived with people who looked after her by preparing her meals and washing her clothes, and where there was money to buy the food and clothes that she needed. Joey spoke about how he does not have a family who looks after him in this way, nor did he have a home like the one where his girlfriend lives. In contrast, he described how he uses a cardboard box rather than a dresser or other piece of furniture in which to store his clothes and belongings, because he often needs to move on short notice, and a cardboard box is portable and more easily moved than a piece of furniture. Joey was among the few juniors in Nancy's English 10 classes. We knew a little about reasons for which he was behind his same-aged peers in school, because he had written in a paper earlier in the year about how he had spent his sixth grade year in Mexico living in a house next to where his relatives lived, without attending school, rather than repeating fifth grade as he had been advised to do by his teacher that year. Following his return to the United States, he continued on to seventh grade, in accordance with his age, despite not having adequately covering fifth grade curriculum material or having completed sixth grade. Not surprisingly, he described schoolwork as 'difficult' and struggled academically; at the age of 16, he was among students at Midwest High who met regularly with guidance counselors who monitored their regular attendance in school.

Potential of Standardized Testing to Build Connections With Students

I was struck by how, despite much criticism about ways in which standardized testing has impacted negatively on curriculum and school learning (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; Taubman, 2009; Au, 2010), a seemingly disconnected series of prompts intended to help prepare students for testing contributed to helping their teacher to build connections with them, and yielded such rich, and moving, accounts of aspects of the students' lives. The writing highlighted ways in which being open to the potential of prescribed curriculum as a means for engaging students in academic discussions, might also yield extraordinary opportunities to learn about students' lives and to connect with them in important ways.

Details shared in student writing offered insights into ways in which issues of equity and social justice may be experienced in their lives in and out of school. Students described experiences in school where they found the content difficult and events and interactions both in and out of school that they found challenging, and even heartbreaking. The students' work highlighted the importance for their teachers to reach to find ways to build connections with them and to support them. Hearing about details of students' experiences such as those featured here further reinforced the importance of teachers reaching beyond their own experiences in an attempt to understand those that their students might be living in their home and school communities in order to better support their learning. This support is important for all students but was all the more important for some of the students featured here because they lived challenging home and community circumstances.

DISCUSSION: NUANCES OF EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM A TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

The examples included here featuring Nancy's experiences of working with her students in her English 10 classes might be

understood in terms of equity and social justice. Based on the small number of examples of interactions and incidents presented here to illustrate ways in which social justice and equity might arise in a high school classroom, we can appreciate the complexity of issues involved. The stories provide us with a glimpse of ways in which the students' access to the curriculum may be understood as less than equitable for some of her students, whether due to financial, political, academic, or language challenges that may hinder their ability to perform optimally, when compared to some of their English-speaking, American-born, middle class peers whose parents are able to assist them in navigating their school responsibilities.

There were many ways in which students might not be able to perform optimally on academic tasks. For Dempo and Minh who had both immigrated to the United States within the last 5 years, their still-developing proficiency in English – the language of instruction and communication within the school community – would render academic tasks that were conducted in this language more difficult. For Yara, and perhaps even Joey, differences in cultural expectations of schooling in relation to home and family responsibilities may come into play, and for Tom and Jordan, the influence of culture in shaping their sense of identity might introduce subtle but important influences that may intersect with expectations of them in school. As suggested by the stories featured here, and countless others at Midwest High and likely at other diverse high schools, the ways in which their access and ability to focus on schooling and school curriculum might be described as unjust or unequal are highly nuanced. Their circumstances might be described as difficult or otherwise 'at risk' of academic failure and early school leaving. The fact that all of the students featured here also identified as members of a minority group added further complexity to their school participation. For some of the students, the added weight of their status as students of diverse background may be likened to the notion of the backpack that McIntosh (1998) refers to when describing the challenges that immigrant and minority students often carry in addition to the usual responsibilities and work of a student.

Influence of Schooling in Shaping Students' Sense of Identity

There is much work confirming the important role of schooling in shaping a sense of ethnic identity of students from immigrant and minority backgrounds (Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Cummins, 2001; Cummins et al., 2005; Chan, 2006), much of it advocating for the recognition of diverse cultures in the curricula and practices as a way of welcoming diversity into the school community and as a way of learning about diversity. Ways in which teachers may acknowledge or accept diversity in their practices and curriculum enactment, however, is less clear. Questions as foundational as the following remain to be resolved – *What are effective ways of acknowledging students' cultural and language backgrounds in school? How can teachers approach this work while also recognizing that different students may prefer different ways of acknowledging their diversity?* Findings of this study highlighted tensions that may arise

in a classroom for a teacher and her students, and revealed further complexities in the design and implementation of school curriculum and school-based activities that may contribute to shaping students' sense of ethnic identity from an equity and social justice lens.

A Narrative Inquiry Approach: Understanding Social Justice and Equity as Experience

As I learned about the stories featured here, I began to think it would be appropriate to understand social justice and equity as experience, from the stance of students who bring with them their prior experience of schooling and life in their homes and community, whether in United States suburbs, urban neighborhoods, immigrant homes and communities or from their lives prior to arrival in the United States, and more specifically, into their current school communities. Students like Denpo, who still carried with him memories of the refugee camp to where he escaped after leaving his home country where his family were limited in what they could say about government initiatives, or his classmate Nate who refers to the hurtful comments he overheard from many foster parents before describing the relief of being adopted by his current adoptive parents, to the many questions arising from witnessing Jordan's angry departure from English class during a lesson intended to be sensitive to his needs, it is obvious that there remains much that we need to learn.

All of these examples can be interpreted as examples of social justice and equity that might impact upon the ability of a student to engage in academic endeavors and achieve school success, although they are often not the stories that come to mind initially when we think about issues of social justice and equity in school. As teachers and teacher educators, keeping in mind ways to broaden understandings of these terms will serve future and practicing teachers well in helping them to more easily connect with their students, especially as increasing numbers of students and their families have arrived as immigrants (United States Census Bureau and American Community Survey, 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2011) from places and experiences unknown to their teachers.

The stories featured in this study may be understood as a way to bridge the space between "knowledge of teachers" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996) and "teachers' knowledge" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). Teachers draw from both knowledge gained through their own personal and professional experiences – "teachers' knowledge" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996) as well as knowledge gained through 'expert' sources such as textbooks, curriculum documents, professional development, knowledge gained from experienced colleagues – "knowledge of teachers" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). Hearing and reading about the experiences of other teachers with their students through oral and written accounts, such as some of the ones included here, offers a means for teachers to discuss nuances in teaching. These stories are important for all teachers, but especially those who are at the beginning of their teaching careers, when they are still building a repertoire of practices from which they might draw.

A narrative approach provided as a means for preservice and practicing teachers to deepen understanding of complexities inherent to teaching an increasingly diverse student population, through opportunities to reflect upon ways in which issues raised for discussion might arise in one's own school context. So many of these stories may be interpreted as 'inconclusive' (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2012), yet knowledge gained through this research informs the development of curriculum and practices for diverse school settings, while also contributing further resources for preservice and practicing teachers to learn about the experiences of students of diverse backgrounds. These "stories of experience" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) then become a way to build their body of professional knowledge by drawing from stories of experience to extend the development of teacher knowledge to include experiences that an individual may not have personally but that they can access through the stories shared and discussed by others.

Finding Ways to Connect With Students

The importance of finding ways to connect with the students is an important component of building teacher knowledge, and helping teachers to learn to support their students, cannot be overlooked in these stories. Over the course of the year, Nancy and I found ourselves unpacking and discussing events and incidents as they unfolded, and referring back to our own experiences in school, in an attempt to better understand her students' perspectives. Without intentions for comparison, we were nonetheless reminded on a number of occasions of striking differences between her own high school experiences in a rural, western part of the state where she grew up in a small, close-knit community with family nearby, to oftentimes isolated experiences of some of her students whose families had settled into this community far from other family members. Some of the students' families struggled financially, and some lived in communities where drug or alcohol abuse, poverty, violence, and teenage pregnancy were among challenges experienced in the family. I also referred to events and incidents from my own childhood in Canada as a child growing up in an immigrant Chinese family to better understand the students' experiences. This move for teachers to draw from their own experiences to inform their work with their students, despite differences in the contexts in which their experiences unfolded, is a natural tendency, especially when lacking experience from which to draw in similar contexts. In this way, teachers may build their body of professional knowledge to inform their teaching by drawing from their own experiences to inform work in still-unfamiliar circumstances. That said, it is obvious from examining these stories that there remains much that we do not know about the students' experiences, or about how their teachers and school staff may better support them in school. With this recognition, it is important to acknowledge a deep need to actively learn about the students' experience and to be wary of making assumptions about what we think we know about the students. Nancy incorporated activities such as individual interviews and assignments requiring more detailed writing about aspects of their lives, into her lessons, such that even those focused on test preparation, offered an opportunity for her to learn more about

her students, and for students to share aspects of their lives with their peers if they chose.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study highlighted further complexities of ways in which equity and social justice might unfold in a school context. Nancy's experiences at Midwest High might be described as an example of the notion of "multicultural education-in-action," described by Schlein and Chan (2013) whereby multiple influences intersect, such that an ongoing process of negotiation among teachers, students, and others, including their friends, peers, school counselors, and other staff is needed in order to support students' adaptation in a diverse school community.

Examining these experiences offers a glimpse of the complexities of: (1) students' experiences of curriculum and school practices; (2) teachers' work as they learn about their students' experiences and draw from their own prior experiences to inform their understanding of equity and social justice in the school experiences of their students; and (3) a narrative inquiry approach as a way to inform our understanding of nuances of equity and social justice in school contexts. Considering equity and social justice as experience may help us to better understand the nuanced complexities of how equity and social justice may arise in a classroom context. Findings of this study reinforce the need for a deeper understanding of the "complexity of teaching" (Cochran-Smith, 2003), and urge us to consider teacher education as a structure or framework through which some of these complexities may be highlighted and examined.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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