

# Journal of Educational Supervision

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Volume 4  
Issue 2 *Critical Issues in Educational  
Supervision and Instructional Leadership*

Article 1

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2021

## Exploring the Impact of Field-Based Supervision Practices in Teaching for Social Justice

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### Recommended Citation

Price-Dennis, D., & Colmenares, E. (2021). Exploring the Impact of Field-Based Supervision Practices in Teaching for Social Justice. *Journal of Educational Supervision*, 4 (2). <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.4.2.1>

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# Exploring the Impact of Field-Based Supervision Practices in Teaching for Social Justice

Journal of Educational Supervision

1 – 22

Volume 4, Issue 2, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.4.2.1>

<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/jes/>

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to understand how field-based supervisory practices support preservice teachers' conceptualizations of reflective practice, curriculum inquiry, and social justice-oriented pedagogies. Moving away from the more traditional supervisory triad model (e.g., preservice student--cooperating teacher--university supervisor), our qualitative investigation examined five supervisory practices: formal observation, Lesson Study, video debriefs/observations, guided observations, and participation in Intellectual Learning Communities (ILCs). Through a case study of two preservice teachers, this study highlights how these supervisory practices helped support preservice teachers' notions of reflective practice and curriculum inquiry but did not deepen their notions of social justice and inclusivity.

## **Keywords**

social justice; supervisory practices; elementary education

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## **Introduction**

Amid current debates regarding teacher preparation and student teaching clinical experiences (Forzani, 2014; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; McDonald et al., 2013), there is a renewed focus on the value that field-based experiences can and should provide in the professional preparation of teachers (Davies et al., 2015; NCATE, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). A growing number of teacher educators are turning to field-based approaches to teacher preparation and student teacher preparation, asserting the importance of systematic opportunities to examine and enact practice as a means to provide more meaningful preservice teacher preparation (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Scholars and teacher educators with critical perspectives, however, have questioned the reductive tendencies of these approaches to teacher preparation, student teaching supervision, and their capacity to build PSTs' (preservice student teachers') equity-oriented knowledge, critical inquiry skills, social justice capacities, and critical pedagogy (Grossman et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2012).

Across our experiences in teacher education, we find many preservice teachers who see critical pedagogy as an elusive construct that is found in the pages of their course readings but not in actual classrooms. In our work, critical pedagogy functions as an evolving theory that informs practice as a reflection of our sociopolitical context. We draw on critical pedagogy in our research and teaching to disrupt asymmetrical power relations and position ourselves and students as agents of change. We ground our courses in critical approaches to teaching and learning to support our students in understanding that teaching-learning processes involving race, equity, and social change are sociocultural, socio-historical, and sociopolitical acts. This triad creates a relationship between pedagogical processes and the cultural, historical, institutional, and political factors that shape them. We want our students to be aware of these constructs as they plan, teach, and work with families in schools.

When surveying the literature on PSTs' critical and social justice pedagogical knowledge, we found gaps in how student teachers conceptualize critical and social justice pedagogies, enact those conceptualizations in the field, and reflect on how those interactions inform their practice. In this study we wanted to better understand how supervision practices grounded in a critical orientation could provide a glimpse into the daily practices, planning, and questioning attributed to critical pedagogy that our participants experienced within their teacher education program. We were curious about the degree to which our participants could translate tenets of critical pedagogy into real time.

Although there is a growing body of literature on the ways that teacher education programs are aligning their equity-based program commitments and experiences with their field placement curriculum (Hoffman et al., 2015; Hollins, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2017), more research is needed to understand the unique ways that teacher education programs are implementing field supervision practices in student teaching models. As such, the purpose of this study is to understand the potential for five supervision practices—specifically formal observations, Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2012), guided observations, video debriefs/observations, and Intellectual Learning Communities—and how these practices shape preservice teachers' (hereafter PSTs') developing notions of reflective practice, curriculum inquiry, and social justice.

## Conceptual Framework

In the wake of restrictive and scripted environments that exacerbate educational inequities while claiming to support leaving no child behind, it is imperative to prepare preservice teachers to understand how these conflicting discourses impact the work they are asked to do in their field placement sites. We are drawing on two bodies of literature to gain a better understanding of how this work has evolved in teacher education as well as to identify areas in our program that need attention. These two areas include: 1) Supervision Practices, and 2) Critical Pedagogy. While we acknowledge that there are other bodies of work from which to draw upon, due to the nature of our study's questions and the conceptual framework of our own teacher education program, the focus of our study is better situated within these two intersections.

The guiding conceptual framework of our own teacher education program is to prepare professional, caring, and social justice-minded educators. This framework is based on three shared philosophical stances that not only undergird our specific program, but also infuse what we do as teacher educators and what we want our PSTs to take away. They include a curricular inquiry, reflective practitioner, and a social justice stance:

1. **Curricular inquiry stance:** Negotiating the multiple perspectives on culture, content, and context, we want our PSTs to become curriculum makers who meet the needs of their diverse learners by designing effective curricula in which all learners have access to core content.
2. **Reflective practitioner stance:** Through our inquiry-based and practice-oriented community, we want our PSTs to continuously ask questions about their practice and embrace a stance of reflection and inquiry toward the interrelated roles of learner, teacher, and leader in P-12 schools.
3. **Social justice stance:** We want our PSTs to be advocates who recognize and work against societal inequities as they manifest in schools. We want our PSTs to work across differences in and beyond their school communities, to demonstrate a commitment to social justice, and to serve the world while also reimagining its possibilities.

Together, these dimensions make up the conceptual framework of our program and the educational space that we continuously hoped to create. They are also the stances that we hoped our five supervision practices would bolster.

### Supervision Practices

After reviewing the literature and considering how it intersected with the social justice principles that shape the conceptual framework our program (e.g., Lipman, 2004; North, 2008), we selected the following 5 supervision practices for this inquiry: formal observations, Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2012), guided observations, video debriefs, and Intellectual Learning Communities, modeled after Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 2007). In this study we define supervision practices broadly. Each of the practices is multi-faceted and frequently incorporates multiple components such as co-planning, peer critique, revision, and reflection. While the supervision practices, and how they were used in our teacher

education program are described in greater detail in Table 1 (see next page), we offer a brief synopsis below.

1. **Intellectual Learning Communities (ILCs):** Drawing from DuFour's (2007) work on Professional Learning Communities, PSTs met weekly at their school site (45-60 minutes) to process their experiences and engage in "casual intellectual conversations" (Program Documents) related to course content or site-specific topics. Topics were up to the PSTs and supervisors to decide, but ranged from discussing instructional strategies, behavior supports, problems of practice, what they were learning in the field and/or coursework, lesson planning, edTPA work, and examining student work, among others.
2. **Video Debriefs/Observations:** PSTs filmed instructional moments (10-20 minutes) at two points throughout each semester. For the first video debrief/observation, the supervisor and PSTs would view and analyze the video together during a face-to-face debrief session. For the second video debrief/observation, PSTs would digitally annotate the video and receive feedback on their annotation from their supervisor.
3. **Lesson Study:** PSTs at a school site would gather to plan a lesson. With the supervisor present, one PST teaches the lesson while the other PSTs observe. The supervisor then leads a meeting to debrief the lesson, and—drawing from observational data and student work—the lesson is redesigned with the aim of improving student learning. The new lesson is then taught in another classroom by another PST. This lesson is also debriefed in a discussion facilitated by the supervisor.
4. **Guided Observations:** Usually conducted near the beginning of each semester, supervisor and PSTs choose an area of focus (e.g., classroom management routines, questioning techniques, teacher language, differentiation strategies, etc.) and then observe a cooperating teacher's lesson with the chosen focal point in mind. Supervisor and PST debrief following the observation and discuss what was observed and learned.
5. **Formal Observations:** Perhaps the most common and familiar of the supervision practices, formal observations involved a supervisor observing a PST teach a formal lesson in a classroom context. After the lesson, the supervisor and PST meet to debrief the lesson. Following the debrief, PSTs submit a page-long reflection on the lesson itself and then debrief with their supervisor.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is an evolving theory and practice that is a reflection of and a response to the current political landscape. The judgments that critical pedagogues make are guided by questions that examine the relationship among power, language, and identity. As such, teacher educators who draw on critical pedagogy to inform their work with PSTs are guided by the premise that knowledge is socially constructed, contextual, and dependent on interpretation (Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994). Critical pedagogy can also operate as a vehicle for change by providing a link between critical theory and classroom practices as educators seek to transform their classrooms into spaces where students can engage in conversations around issues of race, equity, and social change.

We draw on critical pedagogy to make visible the ways our participants engaged in teaching and learning processes from a sociocultural, socio-historical, and sociopolitical stance. Specifically,

Table 1. Supervision Practices

Supervision Practices	Description
School-Based Intellectual Learning Community (ILC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PSTs meet weekly as a professional learning community to process experiences and support the pedagogical practices of the members of the ILC.</li> </ul>
Video Debriefing/ Observations	Fall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PST films an instructional moment</li> <li>• PST and supervisor watch the video together with a specific focus</li> <li>• PST films a second instructional moment and digitally annotates video at 3 substantial moments in video</li> <li>• Supervisor provides feedback on the digital annotation</li> </ul>
	Spring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PST films an instructional moment</li> <li>• PST and supervisor watch the video together with a specific focus</li> <li>• PST uses session outcomes to inform “bridging” video debrief reflection in which they select one fall clip and one spring clip that are in conversation with each other</li> <li>• PST writes a 2-page reflection that addresses the following questions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What do these two clips reveal about your growth as a teacher?</li> <li>○ What do they reveal about some of the challenges you are still grappling with?</li> <li>○ What are your next steps as a student of teaching?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Lesson Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A group of PSTs design a lesson and determine a focus for observation of the lesson</li> <li>• One of the PSTs teaches the lesson while members of the planning group and supervisor observe</li> <li>• The supervisor facilitates a group debrief and lesson redesign</li> <li>• All PSTs teach the new lesson with supervision</li> <li>• During post-observation debrief, supervisor provides observation notes and oral feedback to PST</li> <li>• PST submits reflection on observation/debrief to supervisor electronically</li> <li>• Supervisor provides PST written commentary on the post-observation reflection</li> </ul>
Guided Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PST and supervisor observe a lesson taught by the cooperating teacher with a particular observation lens</li> <li>• PST and supervisor debrief</li> <li>• PST submits electronic reflection on observation/debrief to supervisor</li> <li>• Minimum of 1 per semester at supervisor’s discretion</li> </ul>

Table 1. Supervision Practices (cont.)

Formal Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PST provide a lesson plan prior to observation</li> <li>• Supervisor provides lesson plan feedback</li> <li>• PST enacts the (possibly revised) lesson with supervisor observation</li> <li>• During post-observation debrief, supervisor provides observation notes and oral feedback to PST</li> <li>• PST submits reflection on observation/debrief to supervisor electronically</li> <li>• Supervisor provides PST written commentary on the post-observation reflection.</li> </ul>
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we wanted to understand the relationship among the supervision practices in the teacher education program, the pedagogical processes PSTs relied on in the field, and the cultural, historical, institutional, and political factors that shape each area. A critical framework provided a set of tools that allowed us to trace how decisions made by participants in this study were related to issues around marginalization that were: 1) rooted in systemic structures and did not function as isolated events; 2) connected to a set of principles informed by critical pedagogy and advocacy; and 3) revelatory for how teacher education programs can expand pedagogical and supervision tools to address gaps in practice.

In addition, we believe PSTs need experiences in their teacher education program to help them understand how socially constructed identity markers, equity, and power shape the ways teaching and learning are enacted in various spaces that extend or constrain access to quality education for all students. The participants' teacher education program frequently engaged them in candid discussions about inclusivity, pedagogy, race, equity, and social change based on course readings and asked the participants to craft a teaching philosophy that accounted for these discussions and was reflected in the lived experiences of the students in their classrooms. We were curious as to what degree a social justice-oriented teacher education program, and its accompanying supervision practices, could provide participants with the resources and tools (both conceptual and practical) needed to reflect on their role as advocate and educator, and to consistently challenge themselves to make teaching and learning an inclusive political act.

### **Research Questions**

To understand how particular supervision practices informed PSTs' conceptualizations of reflective practice, curriculum inquiry, and social justice-oriented pedagogies, our qualitative case study was guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways are PSTs making meaning of curricular inquiry?
2. In what ways are PSTs making meaning of reflective practice?
3. In what ways do PSTs understand social justice pedagogy?

Focusing on how to prepare PSTs to learn to use knowledge in action (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, 2011; Grossman et al., 2009; Lampert, 2010), the use of these various supervision practices allowed us to acknowledge the complexity of how developing teachers come to

understand their pedagogical choices and enact specific practices (Lampert, 2010). As previously mentioned, because these practices were also articulations of our own program's conceptual framework, it was equally important that these practices help PSTs understand notions of reflective practice and curriculum inquiry as essential components of social justice pedagogy.

In what follows, we outline the methodology for the study and share findings from two individual cases as well as from the cross-case analysis. We conclude with recommendations for field-based supervision in teacher education programs with commitments to social justice.

## Methodology

This qualitative study was guided by a case study design. We chose a case study approach because such a design allows for an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within a particular context (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003). The phenomenon under study included our five supervision practices (e.g., formal observations, Lesson Study, guided observations, video debriefs/observations, and Intellectual Learning Communities) within a social justice-oriented teacher education program. The unit of analysis involved PSTs' developing notions of reflective practice, curriculum inquiry, and social justice.

## Program Context

The teacher education program selected for this study is located in one of the largest urban districts in the United States. The cohort-based program is designed primarily for those who have no (or minimal) formal preparation in education and are beginning their study of teaching. The program can be completed in one academic year and includes methods courses in literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, a general year-long curriculum and instruction course, and two semesters of student teaching in an urban, public school classroom. Completion of the program leads to an M.A. degree and state certification in grades 1-6. Each year, around 20-35 students, most of whom self-identify as white and female, enter each cohort. As mentioned at the outset of this paper, curricular inquiry, becoming a reflective practitioner, and adopting a social justice stance are key touchstones of the program and were infused throughout the readings and assignments of the year-long curriculum and instruction course. Course readings included Kliewer's (1998), *Schooling children with Down Syndrome: Toward an understanding of possibility*; Greene's (2014) *Lost at School*, Pollock's (2008) *Everyday Antiracism*, Wiggins and McTighe's (2005), *Understanding by design*, Delpit's (2008) *The skin that we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom*, and Letts & Sears' (1999) *Queering elementary education*, among others. Some of the larger culminating assignments included a "Descriptive Review of a Child" where students engaged in a comprehensive asset-based inquiry of a child in their classroom and the creation of a six-week inclusive and socially relevant curriculum framework that used Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) "Understanding by Design", or backwards design.

## Research Context

The faculty of our teacher education program received a grant to pilot a student teaching 'residency'. Drawing on research regarding student teaching supervision practices (Zeichner,

2010), faculty designed the Residency Program to address longstanding concerns about the PST-supervisor-mentor teacher triad model used in the field experience component of the program. The new design included a more collaborative focus on practice and varied supervision approaches—referred to as supervision practices (see Table 1)—within a school-university partnership. In doing so, the Residency Pilot provided an opportunity to expand preexisting approaches (e.g., formal observations) to PSTs’ learning and a testing ground for new approaches that could be applied in other student teaching placement sites. At the conclusion of the academic year, a small team met to design this qualitative case study in order to better understand how the newly adopted supervision practices were supporting PSTs’ conceptualizations of curriculum inquiry and reflection in service of social justice education.

## **Participants**

The participants in our qualitative case study were 5 PSTs of the same cohort who were placed in 5 different elementary schools in a large urban city. The first author was a professor in the elementary education program and the second author was a course instructor for the year-long curriculum and instruction course as well as a field supervisor in the program. All 5 participants were supervised by the second author at some point in the study. To gain consent, the authors gave a 5-minute presentation to all of the PSTs enrolled in the program and followed up via email to solicit participants. Five PSTs expressed interest in the study. For the purpose of this article, we chose to highlight only two out of the 5 participants because we felt that their cases were the most robust in highlighting the affordances and shortcomings of the supervision practices in action.

Data was collected over the course of two semesters, across the year-long curriculum and instruction course and fieldwork (i.e., student teaching). Members of the research team worked on-site with PSTs and were responsible for collecting the data. Qualitative research methods (e.g., Charmaz & Bryant, 2008) were used to collect the following data sources for each participant: field notes, course assignments<sup>3</sup>, lesson plans, audio-taped 30-minute interviews of each PST, observation reflections, anecdotal records, and PST reflections on each of the supervision practices.

## **Analysis**

Our analytical process employed inductive and deductive methods to conduct individual and cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003). Following the processes outlined by Saldaña (2012), we began by coding independently of one another, noting common themes in the data around constructs of reflection, curriculum inquiry, and social justice-oriented pedagogies/stances. Additionally, we drafted a list of working definitions and examples of each code during the first level of open coding (see Table 2).

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<sup>3</sup> Course assignments included a teacher autobiography from each PST, individual lesson plans, and a six-week inclusive and socially relevant curriculum framework that used Wiggins and McTighe’s (2005) “Understanding by Design”, or backwards design.

Table 2. Initial Codes

Assessment	Apprenticeship of observation	Feelings about teaching	Bringing complexity to instruction	Classroom management
Differentiation	Engaging students	Intersectionality/ Positionality	Theory/practice tension	Professional learning community
Responsiveness to students	Politics of teaching	Lesson study	Perceptions about students	Instructional strategies & topics
Reflective stance	Inclusivity	Teaching for social justice	Social justice	Balancing workload between student teaching and college
Being raced/race	Surface level understanding or inclusion of stance in lessons	Culturally relevant pedagogy	SES context	Relationship between CT and PST

Upon completion of first level coding, we collaboratively compared and contrasted our codes and working definitions. Using analytic and reflective memos, we refined the codes and definitions until we reached consensus around 6 second-level codes (see Table 3).

Table 3. Second Level Codes

Inclusivity	Reflective Practitioner	Social Justice Stance	Curriculum Design & Enactment	Navigating Sociopolitical Context	Student Teaching Experience
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Next, we recoded the data to align with the second-level codes. Once our data was recoded, we conducted bi-weekly reflective meetings to refine our coded data selections and shared analytic memos to draw connections between codes and newly identified themes. The purpose of these meetings and memos was to provide coherence and support for our analysis process. To finalize our analysis, we used our shared analytic memos to write up our individual cases.

## Findings

This study focused on how 5 supervision practices in a teacher education program shaped 2 PSTs understanding(s) of curricular inquiry, reflective practice, and social justice stances. Specifically, we provide detailed findings of what we learned from our two cases, Jayme and Alex, and then follow it with a cross-case analysis. As with any case study, our purpose is not to generalize across people or programs, but to provide an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon within a particular context so that teacher educators and practitioners can think about this study's implications for their own programs and students (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003).

### Learning from Jayme

“I am not a complete stranger to the lives of my students, but I also grew up in a completely different environment. I will never fully comprehend who my students are and what they have been through, but I can work toward understanding more about their culture and upbringing” – Jayme

**Background on Jayme.** Jayme entered our elementary teacher preparation program with a global perspective on education that was shaped by her international teaching experiences and travels. She self-identifies as a multiracial/Black woman with a deep commitment to equity and diversity that was shaped by her childhood experiences navigating issues of race in the Pacific Northwest. In our teacher preparation program, Jayme demonstrated a sincere commitment to culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies that centered issues of race. She contributed thoughtfully to class discussions about race, equity, and diversity and decided to focus on “the social construction of race” for her final curriculum design project. She also recognized that while she may share some racial or cultural affiliations with some of her students, she cannot take for granted that she will have insider knowledge about their lived experiences and how those connect to their learning. Throughout the program Jayme expressed commitment to understanding who her students are in the world to make sure that her pedagogy supports their growth as cultural beings. Her statement at the beginning of this section serves as a reminder that knowing one's students is a necessary process for learning how to teach them.

During the program, Jayme had a successful student teaching experience. She was placed in a fifth-grade classroom in an under-resourced area of the city working with students whose families come from various countries in West Africa, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Saudi Arabia, and other communities with predominantly Black or Brown people. In a series of course assignments, Jayme reflected on what she learned about teaching from her experience in this classroom.

**Introduction to supervision practices.** Jayme was introduced to the concept of supervision practices in the year-long curriculum and instruction course. Although these practices were incorporated in the two semesters of her student teaching placement and were supported by her supervisor, during a final interview Jayme shared that she was not always sure she could name the five supervision practices. However, once Jayme was reminded of the framework, she quickly recalled them. When asked to name a supervisory practice that was helpful to her becoming an inclusive social justice educator, Jayme speculated that Lesson Study helped her

and her classmates, particularly with lesson planning. In what follows, we examine how Jayme made sense of the supervision practices as she learned to become a more inclusive social justice educator.

**Curricular inquiry.** Three frameworks that informed how Jayme conceptualized curriculum design were social justice education, disability studies, and culturally responsive teaching. In lesson plan narratives, Jayme highlighted how she relied on a disabilities framework when developing a lesson for Bell's (2014) *El Deafo*. In her reflection she wrote:

I feel that it is important for students to critically think about difference, what the term means, and to talk about how difference and disability can be seen positively (as a superpower) with examples from Cece's transformation into *El Deafo* and her adventures. My goal is to have students explore the idea that certain aspects of ourselves (that vary from others) can be seen as a disability, difference, or a superpower.

Jayme worked with the students in her classroom to examine their understanding of differences that were rooted in deficit ideology. Her goal was to provide a space in the curriculum for her students to reimagine how those differences could be positioned as attributes, particularly as those differences intersected with their identities as learners. Jayme's concern about her students' self-efficacy motivated her to develop lessons that could boost their confidence as learners and strengthen their peer relationships.

Jayme also drew on constructs of social justice education and culturally responsive teaching to inform how she developed curriculum. For example, in a reflection for a class assignment, Jayme argued that curriculum should explore issues of race and equity to help students make sense of issues of power in society. Across class discussions, in her coursework, and pedagogy, Jayme highlighted how knowing her students as cultural beings should be the center of the curriculum.

The supervision practice that had the most influence on Jayme's understanding of curriculum was Lesson Study. During her interview she shared:

Lesson Study was really helpful. The opportunity to engage with my peers to design a lesson was one of the best parts of Lesson Study. It was a really good experience to co-plan a lesson with other student teachers. In fact, I actually would have liked to plan more lessons with my group, maybe even like plan multiple lessons all trying to achieve the same objective, or related objectives, because I think the Lesson Study process made me better at designing curriculum.

For Jayme, the collaborative aspect of Lesson Study—getting together with her peers at her school site to plan, teach, and redesign a lesson—allowed her to bolster her curricular inquiry stance. Particularly noteworthy was that Jayme wished she had engaged more with Lesson Study throughout the program as she felt it made her a “better” curriculum designer.

**Reflective practitioner.** During our interview, Jayme also shared that her experiences as a teacher in Korea informed her decision to apply to our teacher education program. She recalled that when she was teaching abroad, most of the students with “special needs or limited abilities”

were ignored by their teachers. Jayme found this frustrating and whenever she would mention it, the other teachers would say, “Oh, let them just do whatever”. But Jayme felt that because they were students in her class, she wanted to learn how to meet their academic needs. Thus, she applied to our program to learn how to teach with an inclusive philosophy. After two semesters in the program, she said that the focus on inclusivity “helped me realize how I could become a more inclusive teacher in terms of analyzing myself, understanding the principles, and what I believe in as a teacher.” This focus in the program was evident in the curation of course readings, field placements, and course assignments. Jayme could trace the discourse about inclusivity as a framework for developing curriculum and pedagogy throughout her program, but was unclear where the idea of inclusivity and supervision practices intersected.

As a student in the program, Jayme learned to reflect and analyze her teaching and consider how her ideas about culture, ability, teaching, and learning were impacting the ways she designed her lessons and interacted with her students. Reflection was a key theme across her assignments and artifacts related to this study. In our final interview, she stated that “having the time to analyze ourselves, and then our teaching practices was really helpful.” Jayme also shared that if she were required to reflect on her own without prompts embedded in course assignments or supervision practices, she:

probably would have only reflected on my teaching in terms of curriculum like, how did I teach this math lesson? Did the students get the concepts or not? I don’t think I would have thought about the need to individualize my lessons for the students [sic].

Jayme believed that reflection on how to meet the needs of her students as individual learners was more important than just focusing on the objectives of the curriculum. An example of her reflective stance about classroom presence is evident in a class assignment. She wrote, “I can confidently say that I have spent almost every day of this semester as a student teacher trying to work out how to properly communicate with my students while maintaining my presence as an authoritative figure/constructive facilitator in the classroom.” Jayme identified communication with students from so many different cultures as an area of growth that she wanted to work on during student teaching. Many of her students were from backgrounds where adults are seen as the sole authority figure and children have little input about what happens in their daily lives. Jayme found herself trying to balance creating a learning space that offered opportunities for students to share power about curriculum decisions, while maintaining her role as an authority figure in the space.

Jayme identified reflection as an important part of her development as an educator and provided additional examples of how reflection—particularly during the supervision practices of video and guided observations—supported her ability to be thoughtful about curriculum design, develop relationships with students, understand how culture and politics informed her stance as a teacher, and foreground the needs of her students and their community in her pedagogy. During her interview, Jayme explained:

Seeing myself on video doing a lesson was helpful for my teaching practice. It was beneficial to see my body language during the lesson, the way I speak to the students, who I include and even exclude, my management style, and even how I went about

teaching the content during that specific lesson. Video observations really helped me to be more reflective because I got to see myself in action and notice things that I probably didn't notice while I was teaching the actual lesson.

While video observations allowed Jayme with one way to hone her reflection skills, guided observations were also deemed helpful, so much so that it was named as a practice that Jayme intends to regularly use in the future. During her interview, Jayme stated:

Doing guided observations with my supervisor or a peer is a practice that I will definitely remember and use in the future. It deepened my observation and reflection skills by extending beyond what I see in my own practice through my video observations and also helped me to think about what sort of teacher moves can help, for example, elicit student participation and engagement.

Although opportunities for reflection were ample throughout the program<sup>4</sup>, the supervision practices of video and guided observations seemed to assist Jayme in further bolstering her reflective practitioner stance.

**Social justice pedagogy.** Jayme entered the program with a social justice stance that focused on examining race and inequity. During the program, she realized that diversity of opinion and social identity impacted her teacher education. Her stance as a social justice educator was rooted in naming and disrupting systems of oppression, including ones that permeated her teacher education program. For example, Jayme shared that while the program espoused a belief in diversity, the faculty did not reflect that commitment. During her interview, she elaborated on this point and offered the observation below:

I think there is a lack of diversity amongst the professors. I'm not saying that they're not doing a great job. I think they're doing a really good job in everything that they're putting into the lessons. The curriculum is very thoughtful and it's thought-provoking, but I feel like we could be challenged more. And in order to do that, you need to have people with more diverse backgrounds in there. You need missing voices in there.

In Jayme's opinion, the anti-racist, social justice, inclusive stance of the program would have been stronger if faculty from marginalized groups were part of shaping the design and curriculum of the program. She felt her experience as a student would have been more robust and that she would have learned more about how to navigate issues of racism and equity if she had access to faculty from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Jayme referenced her course readings and student teaching experience in a diverse classroom as having influence on how she approached social justice education. However, she did not identify any supervision practices as

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<sup>4</sup> Opportunities for reflection occurred at multiple points throughout the program. Not only was reflection embedded across many of the supervision practices (written and/or oral reflections were required after guided observations, video debriefs/observations, and formal observations; PSTs often used ILCs to reflect on their own experiences/practices), but reflection was frequently required in many of the written assignments of the year long course that accompanied student teaching. These include "Child Study", "Final Curriculum Unit", and "Educational Autobiography", among others.

having an impact on how she conceptualized social justice or enacted those principles in the classroom.

### Learning from Alex

“I want to respond the *same* to all my students.” –Alex

**Background on Alex.** Alex self-identifies as a white, upper middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender woman. Her desire to become a teacher, along with her conceptualizations of social justice, stemmed largely from watching her developmentally delayed older brother struggle in a self-contained special education classroom. In her teacher autobiography, Alex explained that her brother’s schooling experience “severely limited his educational opportunities” and motivated her to try and become the type of teacher who would “respond the *same* to all my students” in order to make sure their academic and socioemotional needs were met. In many ways, Alex brought a sense of advocacy and desire to know her students into our teacher education program.

**Introduction to supervision practices.** Despite being introduced to the supervision practices at the beginning of the program’s curriculum and instruction course and engaging with them multiple times over two semesters, Alex—like Jayme—had difficulty describing how the practices shaped her social justice stance. In fact, during our final interview, Alex seemed confused by the question and asked, “What are the supervisory practices again?” Although she quickly remembered the practices when prompted, Alex credits other facets of the teacher education program (e.g., course readings and class assignments) with helping her develop her social justice stance. However, after the practices were named, she articulated how both guided observations and Lesson Study enriched her reflective practitioner and curricular inquiry stance.

**Reflective practitioner.** As mentioned earlier, opportunities to engage in reflection occurred across multiple points in the teacher education program. However, some of the supervision practices gave Alex the space and time to consider the positive benefits of reflection. As she moved through the program, Alex began to view reflective practice as a recursive process of inquiry and awareness. During her interview, she highlighted how two supervision practices in particular, guided observations and Lesson Study, contributed to her development as a reflective practitioner. Alex shared:

While I think the program has pushed us to reflect on how to do just about everything, guided observations were really helpful. With the help and support of my supervisor, I was able to watch as my CT led a mini lesson and name all the positive things that my CT was doing. It helped me to reflect on my own practice and helped me become more aware of my own pacing of my mini lessons and made me realize I need to include more student-directed talk.

In addition, the peer observations necessitated by Lesson Study crystallized for Alex the significance that reflection can have in improving one’s teaching practice. In a debrief with her supervisor (Author 2), Alex reiterated how “just observing a different classroom teaches you so much; I’ve gotten so many ideas just from being in someone else’s classroom for 30 minutes.” In

fact, opportunities for reflection, observation, and collaboration become so valuable for Alex that she even committed them to future professional development goals:

I think that the observations and reflections from Lesson Study are things I want to carry with me. And I think it's easier said than done, especially with the craziness of life. But I want to keep Lesson Study with me and have it become a goal once a month or once every two months, to find some time to observe another teacher in the school and reflect on what I'm learning.

For Alex, reflection serves a functional tool for improvement that has the potential to expand and enrich her own teaching practice.

**Curricular inquiry.** Perhaps largely informed by the bittersweet memories of her older brother, notions of normalcy, difference, and inclusion were driving forces behind Alex's curricular design stance. This became clear in one of Alex's course assignments. As part of a culminating assignment which required PSTs to design a six-week unit, Alex created a set of learning experiences on the American Revolution that differed from the more traditional who/what/where/when units that elementary students typically experience. Alex's unit, grounded in a Disabilities Studies framework, was designed to push her fourth graders to think critically about who was included and excluded in the "fight for freedom", as well as think about the "ramifications this has for the political decisions being made in the country today." Although the unit did highlight how people of color and women were often excluded from the master American Revolution narrative, the unit remained largely color-blind, a notion we will return to in the next section.

In addition to the creation of a six-week unit, Alex's notions of curricular inquiry, and her own self-assurance as a "curriculum maker" (Alex, interview), were also strengthened through Lesson Study. According to Alex:

Lesson Study really helped me gain confidence in designing curriculum. Working with fellow student teachers, discussing what went well, what could have been done differently, and making adjustments and improvements really helped me to think about how to design curriculum. I thought it was helpful to work with the other student teachers on the lesson plan because it was eye-opening to see what ideas other people have for how they go about designing and thinking about a lesson, and I think it was a good collaborative experience that made me better at designing curriculum.

Lesson Study's inquiry cycle of collaboratively planning, teaching, observing, and revising a lesson, gave Alex the tools to not only design "effective curricula in which all learners have access to core content" (Program's Conceptual Framework), but also helped boost her confidence in viewing herself as competent curriculum designer.

**Social justice pedagogy.** Alex's social justice stance encompassed an activist component that often involved pushing her students to identify, question, and challenge what she termed "injustices." As explained in the "Curriculum Cover Letter" that accompanied her six-week unit on the American Revolution, one of unit's main takeaways was to "help students understand that

the norm is socially constructed and that we, as a society, can change the way it is constructed to make sure every individual is included in society.” However, like the statement at the opening of this section— “I want to respond the *same* to all my students” –this “norm” was implicitly centered around able and dis-abled bodies. Alex and her unit were largely devoid of other markers of difference such as race, gender, sexuality, religious identities, or the intersections between them.

As such, Alex’s social justice stance revolved primarily around equality, or providing students with the *same* opportunity. Absent were notions of equity, or focusing on giving students what they need and considering how institutions and social practices systematically produce such inequities in the first place. As seen in her educational autobiography, Alex eagerly wondered what skills might help her “treat each student as an equally valuable part of the classroom, regardless of whatever abilities or disabilities they may have.” While course assignments and theoretical frameworks such as Disability Studies helped to sharpen Alex’s understandings of social justice pedagogies, none of the supervision practices were ever mentioned, leaving us to wonder about the role they played in shaping PSTs’ social justice stance.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

In agreement with the extant literature (e.g., Yost et al., 2000), supervision practices with reflective components were a significant force in participants’ learning opportunities during student teaching. According to both participants, video debriefs/observations, Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2012), and guided observations were instrumental in helping them deeply reflect on their teaching practice, particularly in regards to how continuous reflection and curricular knowledge are crucial for facilitating student learning. However, not all supervisory practices produced such positive outcomes. Absent from both participants’ interviews and artifacts was information about the role(s) that formal observations or ILCs played in helping them develop a reflective stance as a curriculum designer focused on social justice pedagogy.

In this section, we return to our research questions to summarize what the data revealed about the function of the supervision practices used in this study.

#### **In what ways are PSTs making meaning of curricular inquiry?**

Both participants relied on practical and conceptual tools provided by the teacher education program to make meaning of curricular inquiry. Although Jayme and Alex gained valuable insight into how to design lessons from Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2012) and guided observations, neither identified those practices as supporting their understating of curricular inquiry in service of social justice teaching.

#### **In what ways are PSTs making meaning of reflective practice?**

The program conceptualizes reflective practice as a recursive process of learning and inquiry and as a means to critically consider the political and social contexts that frame one’s teaching. Opportunities for reflective practice were an integral component of program courses and

assignments. The supervision practices were designed to mirror and support this engagement; thus, each practice had a reflective element that provided space for the participants to reflect upon and critically evaluate their experience(s). Both Jayme and Alex identified this element as valuable to their learning and shared multiple examples of how reflection—particularly those embedded in Lesson Study, guided observations, and video observations/debriefs—supported their growth as culturally responsive educators committed to exploring issues of equity with their students.

### **In what ways are PSTs understanding social justice pedagogy?**

The mission of our teacher education program is to foster a social justice stance among PSTs. Across both cases, the data reveal that the supervision practices did not support the participants' understanding of social justice pedagogy. Jayme entered the program with a more sophisticated notion of equity and justice rooted in race, class, ability, and language, and her pedagogy throughout the program reflected this understanding. Alex, on the other hand, entered the program with the notion that equity and justice were tied to ability and making sure all students were treated the same. Although Alex began to question the constructs of normalcy and justice, the supervision practices did not expand her understanding to take up other marginalized identities.

## **Discussion & Implications**

Teacher education faculty are constantly redesigning their certification programs to address longstanding concerns about PSTs' content knowledge, supervision, and the traditional PST/mentor teacher/university supervisor triad model often used in the field experience of a program (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Grossman et al., 2009). Our study builds on this work and includes a more collaborative focus on practice and varied supervision approaches within a school-university partnership. In doing so, this study provided an opportunity to expand on the more traditional, pre-existing approaches (e.g., formal observations), and allowed us to see how additional supervision practices such as video debriefs/observations, guided observations, Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2012), and ILCs allowed PSTs to hone and deepen their stances regarding reflective practice, curricular inquiry, and social justice pedagogies.

Among the collected data, there was a deleterious absence of talk and textual artifacts around teaching for social justice, equity, and/or inclusivity. This led us to wonder whether or not PSTs were seeing the connections between the supervisory practices and how such practices are intended to cultivate beginners' commitments to equity and teaching for social justice. Since both participants articulated how Lesson Study (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2012), guided observation, and video observations/debriefs helped them to further develop their reflective stance(s) and/or build a robust repertoire of curriculum design principles, the lack of connection(s) to notions of equity and social justice is significant. At the conclusion of the study, we discussed implications for future research in this area to determine which (if any) supervisory practices are capable of helping PSTs foster notions of equity and inclusivity and the ways in which teacher educators might facilitate these connections.

Given our small number of participants, our findings are not meant to be universal, but to explore in-depth a phenomenon within a specific context. Moving forward, we would like to explore alternative models for supervision that include the cooperating teacher's use of the supervisory practices in their work with PSTs when providing feedback on teaching demonstrations and curriculum development.

The supervisory practices in this program did not help PSTs deepen their notions of what it means to teach for social justice. This reveals the need for a clearer articulation of how the practices both adhere to our teacher education program's commitments and respond to the contextual particularities of student teaching in a large urban setting. Purposeful reflection and curricular knowledge notwithstanding, our investigation highlights how the inclusion of non-traditional, social justice-oriented approaches do not necessarily guarantee that PSTs will deepen their conceptualizations of teaching for inclusivity and social justice. This potentially worrisome finding has implications for teacher educators and teacher education programs. First, teacher educators need to consider the myriad ways in which supervision practices are taken up by PSTs, as well as *re-frame* and/or create practices that serve the intended aim. And second, teacher educators need to carefully consider the programmatic changes (e.g., courses, assignments, field placements, supervisory practices, etc.) that are needed to bolster PSTs' visions and enactments of social justice in urban public-schools.

We learned two valuable lessons from this study that we immediately translated into practice. The first lesson is that our program's commitment to social justice and equity had to extend beyond the mission listed on the program website. We revised our syllabi, course assignments, course readings, guest speakers, and reflective seminar to reflect an active anti-racist stance. Members of the core planning team also recommended that supervisors who were not instructors or part of our core planning receive workshops on anti-racism and bias during the on-boarding and subsequent meetings throughout the year. Some members of our team felt the policies and practices the program had in place for field placements did not articulate a strong stance about anti-racist teaching, nor did the policies or practices support PSTs who experienced racism in the program or in the field-placement site. As a result, the first author created a program for PSTs of color to support their teaching and mentoring into the profession.

The second lesson we learned was the need to create space for faculty, instructors, students, supervisors, and cooperating teachers to share feedback about what is working and areas for improvement without concern for retaliation. While the program has a yearly retreat for faculty and instructors, the culture of the program does not often allow for everyone to offer critiques and possible solutions during the retreat or monthly meetings. The program also creates and distributes a survey at the end of most academic years to PSTs, but most of the questions participants in this study and previous years responded to would not have addressed the issues revealed in this study. Therefore, the program would benefit from: 1) expanding the questions to specifically address racism, social justice, and equity; 2) distributing the survey to all stakeholders in the program at least twice a year; and 3) analyzing and making use of the data collected, along with new protocols for reporting experiences with racism, to inform modifications to the courses, field-placement experiences, and expectations of cooperating teachers at the beginning of each new semester.

Given that our field is ushering in a new generation of teachers who need experiences that will prepare them to acknowledge and engage multiple worldviews, this generation of teachers will have the privilege of working with an increasingly diverse population of students encompassing a range of racial, cultural, linguistic, gendered, and economic locations, positions, and realities (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011; Johnson, 2016; Matias, 2013). Thus, a goal of teacher education should be to prepare educators to teach and learn in equity-oriented ways that respect and honor these divergent perspectives (Hermann-Wilmarth et al., 2017; Matias & Grosland, 2016). Our findings reveal that a critical approach to teacher education grounded in sustained conversations on equity, diversity, and successful teaching and learning in a range of environments is necessary to align theory and practice for justice-oriented curriculum development and pedagogy. Drawing on tenets of critical pedagogy as a guide provides guidance for how teacher education programs can (1) reflect on and revise curriculum and instructional practices across time and space; (2) build capacity for PSTs to work for social justice in “real-time” without the aid of a blueprint or script; (3) re-imagine models for classroom practices to take into account, build upon, and extend PSTs role as advocates; and (4) create supervision practices that promote criticality across learning environments as a means to challenge oppressive practices that cause trauma for students in school.

Preservice teachers are preparing to enter into a profession riddled with institutionalized patterns of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. Many of these students have never been asked to question – nor had any reason to challenge – a system that has worked for them and/or has provided them with many of the invisible privileges they enjoy on a daily basis (Picower, 2011). Teacher education programs should be engaged in conversations about critical pedagogies that are informed by theory and grounded in practice, particularly in regards to supervision. Then, they will have the time and space to develop the ideas necessary to infuse the curriculum with questions generated from a critical perspective of teaching and learning. This critical perspective will draw on the tools, experiences, and reflective dispositions of teachers/teacher educators as they examine ways to become agents of social change. Such a perspective can generate sophisticated understandings of what it means to contribute to innovative and engaging practices that support diverse learners whose racial identities are often different from their teachers.

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