Teaching (In)justice: One Teacher's Work with Immigrant English Learners

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Abstract A growing body of scholarship advocates for social justice education to address the educational inequities facing immigrant students who are English learners (ELs), but there are few examples of how teachers are conceptualizing and engaging in social justice education with immigrant youth, and even fewer examples of how immigrant ELs respond to social justice education. This article takes us inside one teacher's classroom to see how immigrant ELs responded to a social justice education, which drew on insights from critical multicultural education and critical pedagogy. Through an examination of one high school teacher's classes we will interrogate the meaning(s) of engaging in social justice education for and with immigrant students who are ELs in the early twenty-first century.

Newcomer immigrant youth who are English learners (ELs) from low-income families face numerous obstacles in their pursuit of education. Most of these students attend under-resourced schools, and too often encounter deficit perspectives, which devalue their cultural and linguistic identities. In the larger society immigrant youth face an economy with limited opportunities for social mobility for the poor, and anti-immigrant policies and perspectives (Chavez 2008; Fujiwara 2008; Harvey 2005; Sassen 2001). While all low-income youth face political, economic and educational barriers, undocumented youth are particularly vulnerable (Abrego 2006, 2011). A growing body of scholarship advocates for social justice

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education to address the educational inequities facing diverse students, including immigrant students who are ELs (e.g., Hawkins 2011). However, there are few published examples of how teachers are conceptualizing and engaging in social justice education with immigrant youth, and even fewer examples of how immigrant ELs respond to social justice education (Lee and Walsh 2012).

This article takes us inside one teacher's classroom to see how immigrant ELs responded to a social justice education, which drew on insights from critical multicultural education and critical pedagogy. Through an examination of one high school teacher's classes we will interrogate the meaning(s) of engaging in social justice education for and with immigrant students who are ELs in the early twenty-first century. The central questions addressed in this article are: Is the teacher's social justice practice, which draws on insights from critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008; Freire 1970) and critical multicultural education (Grant and Sleeter 2008; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997; Nieto 2008; Sleeter and McLaren 1995), consistent with his students' conceptualizations of (in)justice? How do immigrant students who are ELs understand the nature of the inequalities and injustices they face? How do the students respond to this teacher's social justice efforts and what do their responses tell us about how they understand the nature of inequality and injustice?

What Does it Mean to Engage in Social Justice Education?

Scholars, policy makers and educators from a range of political and philosophical perspectives have adopted the discourse of social justice education, but among those who advocate for social justice education there is considerable variation regarding conceptualizations of injustice and differences in beliefs about the role of education in addressing injustice (Hackman 2005; North 2006, 2008, 2009). The philosophical and political differences among "social justice" educators reflect the larger debates among social theorists who write about the nature of (in)justice. In her seminal work on social justice, political theorist Nancy Fraser asserted that in the late twentieth century the "politics of redistribution" had been largely abandoned in favor of the "politics of recognition" in political movements and academic discourse (Fraser 1997; Fraser and Honneth 2003). Scholars who focus on redistributive efforts view the persistence of material inequality throughout the world as the central form of injustice and their assumption is that redistributive practices will address the injustice (Wright 1997). Critics of redistribution efforts have argued that the fight for redistribution assumes a homogeneous society that denies the relationship between issues of recognition and power (Honneth 2003; Young 1990). Through a focus on identities, proponents of the "politics of recognition" have brought much needed attention to oppressions based on issues of race, culture, gender, sexuality and other identities (Honneth 2003; Kymlicka 1995; Young 1990). In response to this debate, Fraser argued that while they are distinct, the goals of both redistribution and recognition are indispensable and should be pursued simultaneously (Fraser and Honneth 2003.) In her most recent work, Fraser (2009) has added the political dimension of representation to her theory of justice. Here, she is

not primarily concerned with questions of "ordinary-political misrepresentation" (political science debates over winner-take-all electoral systems, for example), but with a deeper form of misrepresentation she calls misframing, which "wrongly exclude[s] some people from the chance to participate at all in its [the community's] authorized contests over justice" (Fraser 2009, p. 19). Globalization brings into relief the fact that the frame of the traditional nation-state and its citizen subjects no longer suffices because of our vulnerability to transnational forces—global warming, the spread of HIV-AIDS and international terrorism, for example, overflow territorial borders (Fraser 2009, pp. 13–14).

Among education scholars, there has been a great deal of attention directed towards the social justice goals of recognition and redistribution. Critical pedagogy, influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, has historically focused largely on social class inequality and is closely linked to the politics of redistribution. Critical educators assert that education should give students the tools to challenge the reproduction of social class inequality (Apple 1995; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008). Some feminist educational scholars have criticized critical pedagogy for failing to recognize the ways race, gender, sexuality, and other identities intersect with class, power and privilege (Ellsworth 1989; Hooks 1994). By blending efforts for multicultural education and critical pedagogy, advocates of critical multicultural education reflect their commitment to both recognition and redistribution (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997; Nieto 2008; Sleeter and Grant 1987; Sleeter and McLaren 1995). In recent years, many advocates of critical multicultural education have embraced the discourse of "social justice" education, often using the terms interchangeably (Grant and Agosto 2008; McLaren and Sleeter). Other scholars argue that social justice education is distinct in its commitment to activism, including an activist role for teachers (Kumashiro 2004; McDonald and Zeichner 2009).

Constructivist teacher educators have been engaged in discussions about social justice education, and appear to embrace both a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution (Cochran-Smith 2004; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Zeichner 2011). Social justice teacher educators emphasize the importance of encouraging teacher candidates to engage in social action to challenge educational and larger social inequities (Cochran-Smith 2004; Hawkins 2011). Scholars writing about social justice education for immigrant ELs assert that teachers must work to instill both language competencies and socio-cultural competencies (Hawkins 2011). Language competencies are understood to be those privileged by high stakes testing, and it would appear that in advocating the centrality of language competencies in this vision of social justice education scholars are focusing on the role of education in helping students gain *access* to further educational and economic opportunities while simultaneously engaging in critique. Emphasizing the importance of helping students flourish in both the dominant society and in their home communities, these scholars also argue for the importance of building on students' socio-cultural backgrounds.

Examples of social justice pedagogy in practice are varied and include hip-hop educators, those who engage in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Freirean educators among others. Advocates of YPAR assert that by blurring the lines of research, pedagogy and action that YPAR empowers youth to study and take action on issues that affect their lives (Cammarota and Fine 2008; Walsh 2013).

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) and Stovall (2006) argue for the power of using popular culture, particularly hip-hop in teaching marginalized youth as they confront social inequalities in their lives. In his work on teaching mathematics for social justice, Gutstein (2003) has focused on "reading the world with mathematics" (66). Common themes across examples of social justice pedagogy in action include providing students with access to meaningful and challenging academic content, a focus on cultural relevance and an emphasis on developing critical dispositions that leads students to take action in their lives.

While there is a significant and growing body of scholarship on social justice education, there is relatively little in the literature on how immigrant students and other marginalized youth understand (in)justice. By highlighting the way immigrant ELs respond to a social justice pedagogy that reflects a commitment to both the politics of redistribution and a politics of recognition, we hope to contribute to the larger discussions around social justice education. Our assumption is that an understanding of how immigrant youth conceptualize justice and injustice is central to working towards a social justice education that incorporates the realities facing immigrant youth.

Methods: A Collaborative Project

This research represents the collaboration between one university researcher (Stacey) and an ESL teacher (Danny) invested in social justice education practices. By disrupting the traditional boundaries between researcher and participant, we hoped that both the researcher and the teacher would be able to share equally in the learning process (Erickson 2006; Hawkins and Legler 2004). We worked collaboratively to articulate the evolving research questions, analyze the data and write up the results. The data for this article comes from Stacey's observations of Danny's classes, face-to-face conversations between the Stacey and Danny regarding the Danny's work, on-going dialogues via email between Stacey and Danny and informal conversations between Stacey and some of Danny's students. Face-to-face dialogues between Danny and Stacey were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The classroom observations focused on Danny's practice (e.g., curriculum and pedagogical decisions) and on the students' class participation (e.g., types of responses and questions). Data from classroom observations were collected at the school from November 2007 to December 2008. We coded data from Stacey's field notes, our e-mail dialogues, and face-to-face dialogues using grounded codes that emerged from the data (e.g., home country, race, gender, language) and codes from a priori literature-based concepts from relevant scholarship (e.g., redistribution and recognition). Thus, our analysis was informed by inductive and deductive approaches (Emerson et al. 2011).

Danny has an undergraduate degree in political science, a Master's degree and state certification in TESOL, and has recently completed his Ph.D. in Urban Education. He was a founding faculty member of the International High School at Prospect Heights, which opened in 2004. Before teaching at the International High School at Prospect Heights, Danny taught K-5 ESL in an elementary school in

NYC. During our collaboration, Danny taught 11th grade English, served as instructional coach for language and literacy development, and also served as academic and personal advisor to a group of thirteen students. Stacey is an ethnographer who focuses on the ways that race, class, gender and local context inform the educational opportunities and identities of immigrant students. While Stacey was teaching at the Graduate Center, City University of New York she met Danny and a few other teachers from the Internationals and she visited several of the schools. She was particularly drawn to the work at the Internationals because of their reputation for linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy, which she witnessed during her initial visits. Danny and Stacey began to talk about conducting collaborative research on social justice approaches to educating immigrant youth shortly after these visits.

The Internationals' Context

The research was conducted at one New York City public high school that serves approximately four hundred newcomer immigrant students in grades 9–12. The school is a member of the Internationals Network for Public Schools, a group of seventeen schools designed to serve the unique academic, social and emotional needs of newcomer immigrant youth who are also ELs. High school students in the Network come from over one hundred different countries, speak over ninety languages, and over 80 % of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. As ELs from diverse educational backgrounds, the students' English literacy ranges from early elementary to approaching grade level.

Compared to most urban public high schools, those in the Internationals Network have a successful record of educating newcomer immigrant youth who are ELs. The relative success of the Internationals has been attributed to the Internationals' commitment to valuing the cultural and linguistic diversity of its students, the small size of the schools, the inter-disciplinary project-based curriculum that incorporates language development; performance-based assessment; and collaborative team-based teaching (Fine et al. 2005, 2007; Jaffe-Walter 2008; Jaffe-Walter and Lee 2011; Walqui 2000). The philosophy and mission of the Internationals Network explicitly reflect the tenets of both "politics of recognition" and "politics of redistribution." Reflecting the discourse of recognition, the website for the Internationals Network asserts that within the schools "Differences among students and faculty are cherished, and students are continually encouraged to celebrate their cultural and linguistic individuality while embracing their new home" (Internationals website, www.internationalsnps.org/). With respect to issues redistribution, the Internationals emphasize providing students with *access* to greater economic opportunities by providing an academic education that ensures that they are prepared for college positioned for "full participation in democratic society, thereby opening doors to the American Dream" (Internationals website). It was this combination of the discourses of recognition and redistribution that attracted Danny to the challenge of beginning a new high school.

Approaching Social Justice Education: Inside Danny's Classes

Danny described his teaching in terms of critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism and social justice education, and as we reflected on his fluid use of these terms we came to see his commitment to teaching for both "recognition" and "redistribution." Danny's educational philosophy was rooted in his perspective on the nature of inequality and injustice in the larger society and his interpretation of the particular injustices that his students faced in the educational system and in the larger society. Reflecting the politics of redistribution, he believes that the unequal distribution of economic resources represents one of the central injustices around the globe. Citing the influence of Harvey (2005, 2012) and Sassen (2001, 2012), Danny recognizes the structural changes occurring in the political economy of cities like New York because of the postindustrial global circulation of capital. In global cities, there exists an amalgamation of financial services and this has produced an hourglass economy with growing numbers of well-paying positions, dwindling jobs that support the expansion of the middle class, and a large number of service sector, low-wage positions that contribute to the proliferation of the working poor; it is often immigrants, and immigrant women, more specifically who occupy these service sector positions. In our on-going conversations, Danny expressed concerns about his students' futures in this hourglass economy, which positions those with limited educations for low-skill, dead-end jobs. He asserted that because his students are low-income immigrants, ELs, and many are also of color that they are particularly vulnerable in the current economy. He is invested in encouraging critical understandings of economic inequalities and providing students with the tools to challenge these inequalities. Reflecting the politics of recognition, Danny is critical of the standard Eurocentric curriculum for failing to recognize and respect the diversity of student identities and histories. Thus, he advocates a social justice pedagogy that addresses the intersections of class, race, immigrant status, culture, language, gender, sexuality, and other identities because he appreciates that these identity markers can and do indeed have material consequences. Significantly, Danny hopes that education will not only help students improve the conditions of their lives, but also motivate them to work for a more just society for all.

Like other educators influenced by critical pedagogy and critical multicultural education, Danny viewed high stakes testing as a threat to ELs' chances of earning high school diplomas and therefore a threat to social justice. Furthermore, Danny and his colleagues were aware that ELs were particularly disadvantaged by the New York State testing policy because the Regents were designed for native English speakers and are therefore first and foremost tests of English proficiency (Menken 2008). In response to the Regents requirement that would have students take both an English Language Arts and American History exam in the same year, he and his colleagues collaborated to design an interdisciplinary American Studies curriculum that reflected a dual commitment to "recognition" discourses and "redistribution" discourses (Lee and Walsh 2012). During the 2007–2008 school year, the American Studies curriculum included three units: Native American experiences, African American experiences, and US immigration. In the 2008–2009 academic year, the teacher team redesigned the curriculum to include the themes of globalization and

inequality, which focused on both US and international examples. In developing the curriculum, Danny and his colleagues incorporated content that emphasized the perspectives of marginalized communities, and they prioritized the simultaneous development of critical faculties and academic skills, including skills needed for high stakes testing (Lee and Walsh 2012).

The curriculum development for the American Studies curriculum was primarily a collaborative project between Danny (an ESL teacher) and the American history teacher. Their collaboration was supported by the 11th grade team which met twice weekly throughout the school year to discuss curriculum, assessment, instruction, and students' progress. The curriculum was designed to address students' lived realities, including the need to engage meaningfully with content, the need to hear truth telling, the need to develop critical literacy, and the need to pass high school exit exams. As a founding member of the school, Danny viewed the creation of the school as an activist project that has at its foundation an alternative vision of schooling for immigrant ELs. This vision influenced everything from systems and structures for teachers and students to hiring practices. The school's teaching schedule provided less teaching time and more time to meet with colleagues than traditionally structured schools; hiring practices allowed teachers to hire colleagues who would be committed to "additive schooling" that honored students' cultural and linguistic resources. Although this research provides no insights into other teachers' classrooms, the school's vision, mission, and structures attracted teachers with particular dispositions toward teaching and learning and working with marginalized populations.

Class, Race, and "Redistribution" Discourses

Danny addressed issues surrounding economic inequality and the discourse of redistribution in each unit of the American Studies curriculum. He believes that economic inequalities are deeply connected to race and gender inequality and in his classes he pointed to the raced and gendered patterns of inequality in the US. In an interview with Stacey, Danny explained that he has been influenced by the work of Freire, particularly the idea of encouraging critical consciousness through dialogue and reflection and teaching students to "read the word and the world," that is, understanding the structural forces that influence people's quotidian experiences. He explained that although he recognized that it is "paternalistic to teach young people who have experienced inequality *about* inequality," he believes that students need the language to articulate inequality and the tools to challenge it. Thus, while Danny believes that academic credentials are part of the tool kit students need in the current economy he also believes that students need to be able to critically examine the conditions of their lives.

Students related to class discussions that focused on economic inequality, often referring to the economic challenges faced by their families. Tellingly, students used an "us" (i.e., poor) versus "them" (i.e., middle and upper class) discourse in talking about economic issues. During a class on human rights, Danny had students write an inner and outer circle on a chart paper and identify "problems or needs faced by

your community" on the outside and "by you and your families" on the inside; without exception the students identified economic issues—landlord tenant issues, safe/affordable housing, access to healthcare, gang violence, drugs and other issues associated with living in poverty. This activity was taken from a curriculum resource entitled *Bridge: Building a Race and Immigration Dialogue in the Global Economy* (2004), designed to build coalitions among various groups. Danny also used the resource's immigration history timeline, which depicts lesser known aspects/perspectives of US immigration history such as the forced migration of enslaved Africans and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. On other occasions during the unit, students spoke about their concerns about paying for college and helping to support their families. Not insignificantly, however, students often interpreted the economic issues they faced as being due to their own limitations (e.g., language) and not to systems or structures. Students also had a tendency to identify barriers as being at the individual rather systemic level, describing landlords who treated their families unfairly as "mean," and "ignorant."

In response to these individualized discourses, Danny encouraged students to connect their personal economic struggles to larger economic systems. In one class, for example, Danny used the "Ten Chairs Activity" to teach students basic economic concepts such as wealth, income, assets etc. and to encourage a critical discourse around the unequal distribution of wealth in the US (http://www.teachingeconomics.org/content/index.php?topic=tenchairs). The activity entailed ten student volunteers representing the distribution of household wealth in the US by first having one student stand behind each of the chairs and then asking one student to lie across seven chairs and the remaining nine students to share three chairs. Danny hoped that students would see that the concentration of wealth among a few is not just unfair but systemic and reproductive. The field note Stacey recorded during that class read as follows:

> Danny asked the students to line up 10 chairs and then asked one student to volunteer to represent the wealthiest 10 %. Next he instructed the student representing the wealthiest 10 % lie across seven of the chairs. Finally, he instructed the remaining students to pile onto the remaining 3 chairs. The students were laughing and talking to each other throughout the process, but they seemed to immediately "get" the idea of economic inequality. One student even made a connection between the wealthiest 10 % and King George's treatment of the colonies (apparently, they addressed this in history). When Danny asked students why folks didn't challenge the elite, one student responded "If we organize the 10 % might make it worse." After that comment some students went on to talk about their dreams of being really "rich" one day.
> (Stacey's field note, Nov. 10, 2008).

As this field note demonstrates, students' responses to the lesson were complex and even contradictory. Students recognized that class inequalities were unfair and they also appreciated the fact that people with power are unwilling to simply give up their power and privilege. Interestingly, they drew largely on their experiences and observations in their native countries in order to make sense of how powerful groups

operate, which appeared to lead them to conclude that there are greater opportunities in the US. Thus, students embraced the idea of meritocracy and many fantasized about achieving the American Dream despite their awareness of inequality in the US. Furthermore, students suggested that economic inequality in the US was largely the result of individual characteristics like the lack of English proficiency or the lack of individual effort.

Although Danny never told students what they should think, he regularly challenged students' assumptions regarding the achievement ideology. In the unit on Native Americans, for example, he drew their attention to the high rates of poverty among Native Americans as a way to illustrate the intersections of race and class and to highlight the fact that Native Americans face institutional barriers to social mobility and a history of dispossession. Like their interpretations of social class inequality, students' understandings of race and racism were also complex and mired in contradictions. Students' comments during classes suggested that they recognized the existence of a racial hierarchy in the US that positions whites at the top. In one class discussion, for example, students talked about their awareness that "Whites are still more powerful" than other groups in the US. While they recognized this as a form of injustice, they appeared to accept it as a fact that couldn't be changed.

Like immigrant youth throughout the US, the students in Danny's classes are grappling with the forces of racialization (Lee 2005; Lopez 2003). Danny's observations of his students and his own dissertation research suggest that Black immigrants are particularly conscious of being racialized as African Americans (Walsh 2013). While students recognize that they are subject to racial discourses and they talk about encounters with racism, they believe that racism is fundamentally a matter of individual "prejudice" or "ignorance." Danny reported, for example, that he'd heard students use the discourse of individualism and hard work to downplay racism against African Americans. Here, it appears that students have internalized the dominant discourse around colorblindness and post-raciality, which suggests that institutional racism has been eliminated and that people of all races have equal opportunities (Bonilla-Silva 2010). According to this perspective, racism is an anomaly explained by ignorance and/or limited to extremists. As young people coming of age in an era dominated by neoliberal discourses, which celebrate free markets, competition, individualism and the idea of a post-racial society, it should not be surprising that the students have adopted the discourse of meritocracy to make sense of social inequalities (Harvey 2005; Kumashiro 2008). Furthermore, their status as immigrants gives them a dual frame of reference whereby they compare opportunities in the US with opportunities in their native countries, which contributes to an optimistic attitude towards the US (Kao and Tienda 2005). In short, the students in Danny's classes express an awareness of economic injustices but they are less certain about Danny's interpretation regarding the nature of economic injustices. Despite the fact that students diverged from Danny's analysis of economic and racial inequalities, both the students and Danny agreed that education might help students face inequalities.

Immigrant Identities and the Discourse of Recognition

The website for the International Network of Public Schools, for example, proudly states, "At International high schools, a badge of prestige replaces the "stigma" of immigrant status for students, families, and faculty." In Danny's classes and throughout the entire school there is recognition of the strengths that immigrants bring to this country and the obstacles they face as newcomers. Not surprisingly, the students in Danny's classes expressed a shared identity as immigrants, which they expressed in terms of us (i.e., immigrant) compared to "Americans."

As noted previously, Danny critiqued the standard Eurocentric curriculum in schools for failing to respect and recognize students from diverse backgrounds. He explained that he worked towards a critical multicultural curriculum that exposed students to "alternative narratives, the truths of those who have been systematically excluded from writing history," including those marginalized by race, gender, sexuality, and immigrant status. Reflecting the discourse of recognition, Danny regularly drew on students' identities and funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992) as a way to help students make connections to material that might initially seem inaccessible for ELs. When introducing students to new concepts or words, Danny would ask students to draw on knowledge from their native countries and/or languages. For example, in one class that Stacey observed Danny raised the following question, "Why do some members of the Native American community refer to Thanksgiving as a National Day of Mourning?" When it became apparent that students didn't know the word "mourning" Danny defined it and then asked students for examples of how mourning was observed in their native countries (Lee and Walsh 2012). According to Stacey's field notes Danny engaged students' backgrounds in every class she observed and students seemed to welcome opportunities to share information about their native countries and cultures.

The unit on immigration offered students multiple opportunities to draw on their own experiences and identities as immigrants to make sense of historical and contemporary texts. In keeping with Danny's critical perspective, the curriculum introduced students to the racialized nature of immigration policies throughout US history. During the unit on immigration, the students took a field trip to the Tenement Museum, which focuses on the experiences of generations of working class immigrants who settled on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Danny hoped that this trip would help his students to see the historical differences between pre- and post-1965 immigration and serve as a point of comparison for their own immigration experiences. The following is a field note from the class the day after the field trip.

> 4th period, 11th grade English: Yesterday the class went on a field trip to the Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side so Danny started the class by putting the students in small groups and asking them to talk about what they saw or learned at the museum. After a few minutes he asked the groups to report to the large group and most of the talk centered on basic living conditions—plumbing, showers, heat, gas lamps etc. Next, Danny asked, "Did the immigrant families look like your families?" One boy raised his hand and

said, "Previous immigrants all lived together. Today immigrants, we all gather together." Danny responded by asking why immigrant communities form. A Chinese girl responded, "You feel better when there are similar people. I lived in Chinatown when I first came and you can just go out and speak Chinese." This was the second time today that I heard students talk about the comfort and safety of being able to speak in their native languages at school or in their communities.

(Stacey's field note, March 4, 2008)

What is particularly striking about this class discussion is the counter-narrative that the immigrant youth offer about ethnic enclaves. In contrast to hegemonic discourses that frame ethnic enclaves as "ghettos" that immigrants need to escape, the students pointed to the social benefits of living among co-ethnics. Although poverty is certainly a serious issue in the immigrant neighborhoods in which many of these youth live, these students emphasize the comfort of being able to go out into the streets and communicate in their native languages. Like sociologists who have pointed to the social capital shared within ethnic enclaves, these students believe that ethnic communities can offer a measure of comfort and protection from the dominant society (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Given that the school is designed to address the specific educational needs of ELs, it is not surprising that students identified strongly as ELs. Importantly, students' native languages are respected in the school and it is not uncommon to hear a dozen different languages during passing periods. Although English is the language of instruction in Danny's classes and all classes in the school, students are encouraged to use their native languages to translate for peers and to make sense of new concepts. In casual conversations with Stacey, students repeatedly made comments about the security of being at a school where "Everybody is the same… Everyone is learning English." Students volunteered that they enjoyed the fact that they could practice English without fears regarding their accents. As one student asserted, "Nobody makes fun of your English." Previous research has identified that ELs often feel silenced by native English speaking students who police their accents, and some of Danny's students remember being teased in middle school for speaking accented English. Not insignificantly, this silencing hampers ELs' ability to participate in classes and to develop their language skills. Danny was very deliberate about giving students the opportunity to formulate their thoughts—in both their first language and English—and practice speaking with one another in small groups before participating in whole-class discussions. Danny also encouraged students to draw on the arts to articulate themes from the readings. For example, in one class that Stacey observed he asked students to represent a theme in their book through molded clay, and in another class he had students write dialogue and act out a scene connected to a theme in their readings.

Danny and his colleagues are profoundly aware of the fact that ELs are disadvantaged by New York State's requirement that all students, including newcomer ELs, have to pass five Regents exams in the following content areas to earn a high school diploma: English, global history, the living environment, math, and US history. More than assessments of basic skills, the Regents are content-

driven exams with a reputation for being academically challenging even for native English speakers (Grant 2001). ELs have consistently struggled to pass the exams and high school dropout rates among ELs have increased since the implementation of this policy in 2000. In 2005, for example, only 33.2 % of ELs passed the English Regents in New York City (Menken 2008). As mentioned previously, Danny and his colleagues developed the American Studies curriculum in response to the Regents requirement. Their goal was to create a social justice curriculum that prepared students for the Regents and also provided students with the critical tools to examine social, political and economic inequalities (Lee and Walsh 2012). Additionally, Danny and his colleagues focused on what they thought was of value on the exams—producing a cogent piece of writing that drew thematic connections between two readings, for example.

In the 2008 cohort at Danny's school, nearly 80 % of the students received passing scores on the English Regents Exam by the end of their 12th grade year. Behind this rosy statistic, however, were stories of anxious students who were frustrated by having to retake the exam multiple times before earning passing scores. The very fact that so many ELs are forced to retake the Regents reflects the fact that the policy fails to recognize the unique language issues facing ELs (Menken 2008, 2009). Significantly, the Regents policy confirms students' fears that a lack of English proficiency is an enormous obstacle in the US. As recent immigrants, these students have witnessed the global spread of English, which further cements their belief that their future opportunities are first and foremost tied to becoming English fluent. Similarly, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) found that immigrant youth identified language as the most significant obstacle to social mobility in this country.

Students' concerns regarding English fluency and accents emerged spontaneously over the course of Stacey's observations. During a discussion of *American-Born Chinese*, Yang's 2006 graphic novel that addresses the racial stereotyping faced by Chinese Americans, the issue of speaking "accented" English emerged as a common concern among the students. The following field note is from that class:

> Danny was leading a discussion of "identity issues" in *American-Born Chinese*. In response to Danny's prompt to "tell me a little about the characters," one student volunteers that the character Jin (American-born Chinese) tells the character Wei Chen (Chinese immigrant) – "This is America speak English." Danny asked the students if they've ever been in this situation and they all nod vigorously. Next, Danny asked the students to discuss the stereotypes represented in the Chin-Kee character. Chin-Kee represents the epitome of the Chinese stereotype who has slanted eyes and speaks pigeon English. While the Chin-Kee character is intended to trouble the stereotype of Chinese people as perpetually foreign, Danny's students did not seem to recognize that Chin-Kee's use of Ching-lish represents a stereotype. On the contrary, some students said they thought that they sounded like Chin-Kee even when Danny suggested that the accent was an exaggeration.
> (Stacey's field note, Sept. 23, 2008)

As the field note suggests, some students have internalized shame and fear regarding their "accents." Although students across language groups worried about their "accents", Danny notes that, "Chinese students seemed most aware of their accents and were most likely to be ridiculed." This is not particularly surprising given the way Chinese "accents" have come to represent the quintessential foreignness of Asian Americans (Tuan 1998). During another one of Stacey's observations, Danny asked the students to answer the following prompt: "If I were a different person, I might be good at…" He used this prompt to first have students think about their own character before moving onto the characters in *American-Born Chinese*. This prompt was followed by, "If — (one of the characters in ABC) were a different person, s/he might be good at…" Tellingly, one student immediately responded by saying "If I were a different person I would be good at English communication. Use perfect English to speak to anyone." Perhaps even more significant was the fact that almost every student in the room nodded in agreement.

While multilingualism is a reality in the US, and in NYC in particular, hegemonic forces have responded to multilingualism with English-only agendas. Within this political context, monolingualism is glorified and multilingualism is stigmatized as a sign of lower-class position and/or evidence of insufficient patriotism (Miller 2011). Individuals who are identified as speaking "accented" English, particularly those who are economically dispossessed, are viewed as being less intelligent, less qualified, less desirable and potentially dangerous (Lippa-Green 1997). As scholars have argued, the very concept of an "accent" reflects race and class bias and the belief that some people speak "without accents" is a fiction (Lippa-Green 1997). To be clear, middle class whites who are bilingual are granted a privileged status as elite cosmopolitans. Given this larger socio-political context, ELs and speakers with "accents" face institutional (e.g., testing policies) and interpersonal challenges. Thus, the students' fears and concerns regarding their "accents" should be seen as nascent understandings of the political nature of language.

Through a combination of fiction and non-fiction readings, Danny hoped that the unit on immigration would help students to grapple with issues such as family separation, cultural and linguistic differences, documentation status and citizenship. He explained that his overarching goal was to offer students a "counter-narrative to the hegemonic story of 'give me your tired, your poor…'" Of particular note to Stacey, were the students' discussions surrounding undocumented immigrants. During a small group discussion of *Across a Hundred Mountains* by Grande (2006), she observed students engage in a dialogue about the particular hardships that the characters "without papers" faced. The students explained that they could relate to the problems faced by these characters because they all knew people who are "without papers." The students asserted that immigrants "without papers are treated like criminals," which they argued was both unfair and dehumanizing. In response to Stacey's questions about the challenges facing undocumented immigrants, the students quickly identified limited opportunities for employment, not being able to go to college, fear of deportation and being treated like criminals.

Significantly, the students in Danny's classes never used the term "illegal" to describe undocumented immigrants, preferring the term "without papers." Stacey

initially assumed that Danny had engaged the students in a discussion about the problematic nature of the term "illegal", but Danny explained that he had never had to raise the issue because students all talked about people as "having or not having papers." The students' emphasis on "papers" implicitly highlights the fact that immigrant status is a bureaucratic category, which does not reflect on an immigrant's worth and/or his/her contribution to the US Interestingly, the students' discourse around undocumented immigrants is consistent with the language used by immigrant activists who have fought back against term the "illegal" and have mobilized the idea that undocumented youth are "deserving" of an education and a path to citizenship.

Danny estimates that anywhere between twenty and thirty percent of the students at the school are undocumented, and that many more students are likely from families with mixed document status. For undocumented youth, the challenges of entering adulthood are particularly traumatic as they leave the relatively protected space of high school (Gonzales 2011). Danny talked about his experience working with undocumented students who suffered from anxiety and depression because they realized that they would not be able to afford college because they are not eligible for federal financial aid. In an email exchange, Danny explained the dilemmas in advising undocumented students—"It's very challenging to advise students in this situation because I want to avoid fatalism, but also find the correct balance of optimism and realism. This is not easy." Indeed, previous research has found that undocumented youth struggle with the paradox of having the same aspirations as their documented classmates only to find out they will not have the same opportunities to realize their dreams. As Abrego argues, "this can often create disillusionment for undocumented students, many of whom have already internalized US values that guarantee upward mobility for those who succeed academically" (2006, p. 223).

In short, undocumented immigrants encounter a hostile context of reception that hampers their process of incorporation into the US (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2011). For educators at the Internationals, the barriers facing undocumented youth pose uniquely frustrating challenges that highlight the limits of teachers' work. Some teachers at the Internationals have taken steps to engage students in activist work, including one of Danny's colleagues who taught a unit on immigration rights and then organized a trip to Albany for students to meet with representatives about issues of concern to immigrant communities. More recently, teachers held DREAMERS fundraisers to provide college scholarships for undocumented students at the school.

Gender as a Point of Difference Among the Students

Thus far, we have focused on the students' shared perspectives on (in)justices, but it is important to point out that there were also points of difference. Issues related to "gender" proved to reveal interesting divergences in opinion among the students. On numerous occasions, girls spontaneously raised issues regarding gender norms in their own cultures, revealing their personal struggles with their parents' gendered

expectations. In contrast, boys only explicitly discussed gender issues when Danny prompted them to do so. Although students from various ethnic groups recognized the existence of gender "differences" between girls and boys, Chinese girls were the only students to express vocal criticism regarding gender "inequality" in their families and in their culture. During one class that Stacey observed, a Chinese girl criticized Chinese parents for "preferring boys" and asserted that China's one child policy had contributed to a rise in female infanticide. In an assignment to write an interior monologue as part of a larger creative nonfiction piece, a Chinese girl wrote the following about Chinese gender norms: "Are boys more important because they have a penis and balls?" During another class that Stacey observed, a Chinese girl remarked that many Chinese immigrants from China come to the US so that they can have more than one child and be assured of having at least one boy. This student went on to assert that the preference for boys was rooted in cultural traditions about "carrying on the family name." Danny explained that the topic of China's one-child policy had come up in class on various occasions and that Chinese girls were overtly critical of the preference for boys in Chinese culture. China's one-child policy has come under increasing scrutiny in China and among Chinese immigrant communities (Schulman 1996). Thus, it is likely that these girls are well aware of the protests surrounding the policy and are applying a gendered lens to their interpretation of the policy.

In contrast to the Chinese girls who were often quite vocal in Danny's classes, the Chinese boys were strikingly silent. While the individual personalities of the students may explain some of the differences between Chinese girls and boys, Danny noted that his colleagues had also observed that Chinese girls were generally more vocal than boys. In reflecting on the boys' relative silence, Danny hypothesized that the boys may be struggling with the loss of relative privilege in the US as Chinese girls have become more vocal regarding Chinese gender norms. Research on immigrant youth provides some support for the idea that some Asian immigrant boys may feel as if they are on the losing end of things in a society that espouses greater gender equality and simultaneously denigrates masculinities associated with Asians (Lei 2003; Qin 2009a, b).

As noted earlier, male and female students across ethnic groups were able to identify status differences between men/boys and women/girls in various cultures, including differences in access to education and work and differences in individual freedom. While Danny attempted to get students to see the socially and culturally constructed nature of gender, the students relied on a discourse of biological differences between girls/women and boys/men in order to make sense of cultural norms around gender. During one class, for example, Danny asked students to think about attitudes towards women/girls as a way to begin a conversation about violence towards women. After a brief reflection, one boy responded, "In my country, parents say the girls have to be careful… stay away from boys because the boys can get you pregnant." According to this student, the fact that girls are vulnerable to pregnancy is a justification for differential treatment in families. As the discussion progressed, students continued to rely on biological accounts of gender to make sense of women's vulnerability to violence, poverty and inequality. In reflecting on this particular class, Danny wrote, "I was trying to get at the devaluation of anything

perceived as feminine and how this leads to misogynistic attitudes which can ultimately lead to violence." Like others who embrace biological constructions of gender, however, Danny's students used biology to justify differences and ultimately inequality.

Of course, the focus on biological differences between men and women is not unique to immigrant communities. Studies of US schools have shown that teachers and students across racial and class backgrounds often depend on biological constructions of gender in their everyday discourse (Abu El-Haj 2006; Elliott 2008). What is particularly interesting in the case of Danny's students is the way the biological constructions of gender and cultural discourses around gender intersect. Students almost always prefaced their biological constructions gender differences with phrases such as, "In my country" or "In my culture." By highlighting the fact that they were drawing on knowledge of their cultures, students appeared to be claiming a kind of expert status (i.e., authority) and demanding cultural recognition. The use of these phrases also appeared to be a way of signaling respect for the cultural backgrounds of their classmates who might have different perspectives regarding gender.

Using "Recognition" to Resist

Interestingly, students called on the discourse of recognition to resist information and/or perspectives that they found problematic. In the following field note students justified their homophobic and transphobic attitudes by asserting that they were simply expressing religious and cultural beliefs.

> Third girl in the group to present her portfolio began to talk about the various things she'd learned about gender and sexuality in her 12th grade Economics and Government class. She giggled slightly when she mentioned transgendered individuals. Danny responded to the student by asking her, "What makes talking about certain issues related to gender and sexuality taboo?" One of the boys chimed in with "Talking about sex is a sin. We learn that from our parents. It's hard to talk bout this stuff seriously because you are used to making fun… "You're gay, you're gay." Danny responded to the giggles with another question, "Are there gay students in our school?" All the students responded in unison with a "No!" Danny then asked if there were gay teachers at the school and they all said no again. One student responded, "Why would someone get up and say I'm so and so and I'm gay. You just wouldn't do it." Another student added, ""Our parents say being gay or lesbian is bad. It is a religious thing…. Cultural thing. Another chimes in with the point that homosexuality is illegal in his country.
> (Stacey's field note, January 18, 2008)

Notably, the students did not rely on biological discourses here but solely on cultural discourses. In short, the students were arguing that their homophobia and trans-phobia were rooted in their immigrant cultures and therefore acceptable. Although Danny attempted to get the students to think about the fact that there

might be LGBT students at the school, the students resisted the idea that this was even possible, associating queerness as being outside the immigrant communities. In pointing to the students' reliance on recognition discourses to resist inclusive discourses around LGBT communities, we are not suggesting that immigrant communities are more homophobic/trans-phobic than other communities. Indeed, it is beyond our project to weigh in on the relative homophobia within immigrant communities. Our point is that the youth appear to realize the power of invoking their cultures and religions in their acts of resistance. The students are engaging in a strategic essentialism, which enhances their resistance with an authority that can't easily be questioned by cultural outsiders (Spivak 1998.) Although strategic essentialism offers groups important leverage in resisting hegemony, it also serves to silence within group variation. As Danny and Stacey reflected on this interaction, Danny reported that there was a gay-straight alliance at the school and there were a few students who were "out" as gay or lesbian. He also recalled that he has had former students who have graduated and later come out as gay, lesbian or bisexual and that these students' stories confirm for him the importance of making a space of LGBT students in the school. Ultimately, the students' resistance reminds us that students are not (nor should they be) passive receptacles for teachers' knowledge. It also reminds us that discourses of recognition are not necessarily progressive and can even be mobilized to support inequality (Fraser 2009).

Reflections on Students' Responses to Danny's Social Justice Practice

Danny's approach to social justice pedagogy reflected both the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition. As previously discussed, Danny believes that a social justice education for his students should honor their identities (e.g., as immigrants, ELs, people of color etc.), and provide them with the critical and academic tools to navigate and challenge inequalities. Through snapshots of Danny's classes, we've attempted to illustrate how students responded to Danny's social justice pedagogy. By examining students' responses to Danny's social justice efforts our research offers important insights into what injustices immigrant youth face and how they make sense of the causes and nature of these injustices. Danny's students expressed concerns regarding injustices related to economic mal-distribution and injustices related to mis-recognition or lack of recognition. Students' stories are saturated with struggles related to being immigrants, being ELs, being poor and being of color. Not insignificantly, many of their anxieties—helping to support their families, paying for college, finding/paying for decent housing—are clearly tied to economic issues and therefore students could readily relate to readings and class discussions on class inequality and poverty. The students' economic struggles were compounded by their identities as immigrants and ELs, and they worried that their language skills might prevent them from getting good jobs and being "recognized" as Americans. As we noted, students held tight to their belief in the achievement ideology even as Danny suggested that inequalities were systemic. They hoped that education would help them achieve greater economic security but they were keenly aware that the context of standardized testing posed

serious hazards for them as ELs. Undocumented students and those from mixed status families were painfully aware that immigrants without papers face additional obstacles to higher education and are particularly vulnerable to draconian work conditions. The plight facing undocumented youth and/or youth from mixed status families illustrates that immigration policy is one of the most central social justice issues facing immigrant students.

While our research calls attention to the shared injustices faced by low-income immigrants who are ELs, it is crucial to emphasize that immigrant youth do not represent a monolithic group. Girls, for example, expressed concerns regarding gender inequality in their communities and in the larger society. Although boys did not express concerns specifically related to gender, a growing body of literature suggests that immigrant males face intense surveillance and are often racialized as criminals (Lee 2005; Lopez 2003). Differences in race and religion are two other areas that are likely to reveal differences in immigrant youths' experiences and perspective. Given the predominant heterosexist discourse that we witnessed among the youth, we suspect that immigrant LGBTQ youth face the burden of invisibility. Social justice education for immigrant ELs must take into account both the common concerns shared by immigrant students and the variation among immigrant students.

In short, our data indicates that students' understandings of (in)justice both converged and diverged from the social justice practice presented in Danny's classes. The students have a clear understanding of both mal-distribution and misrecognition because, as immigrant ELs who are predominantly poor and of color, they have experienced poverty, racism, English-only policies, and cultural subjugation. However, where they locate the root causes of mal-distribution and misrecognition sometimes differed from the understandings their teacher hoped they would develop. This is particularly evidenced in their attribution of economic inequality to individual rather than structural causes and their post-racial belief that racism is extremist and ignorant rather than institutionalized practices that maintain white supremacy. Furthermore, the fact that some students used the discourse of cultural recognition to erase the spectrum of sexual orientation within groups reminds us that calls for recognition can be used to support the status quo.

What do the convergences and divergences in understandings regarding (in)justices tell us about social justice education for immigrant youth? We argue that the very fact that students were engaged with the class content suggests that they found Danny's social justice practice to be relevant. In other words, the fact that students actively participated in class discussions to either challenge or agree with Danny's interpretations of (in)justice suggest that the issues mattered to them. Ultimately, the students' resistance reminds us that students are not (nor should they be) passive receptacles for teachers' knowledge. Students' identities, values, and experiences influence how they listen to and make sense of what teachers teach. Some scholars have found that teachers hesitate to share their political perspectives with students because they fear influencing their students but Danny's students appeared to feel comfortable expressing their own opinions and even called upon their cultural backgrounds to back up their positions (Hess 2009). This suggests that teachers may share their political perspectives with students without fear of undue influence if they have created an atmosphere where disagreement is possible.

Students must be able to trust that their identities and perspectives will be respected if they are to take the risk to actively engage in learning (Erickson 1987).

Social justice education for immigrant ELs must prepare students to navigate the dominant society and must also help them deconstruct, critique and negotiate economic mal-distribution. Immigrant students must have access to meaningful academic preparation that will enable them to earn both the necessary credentials and the critical knowledge to resist being trapped in low-level service jobs. Current testing policies that privilege native English speakers further harm ELs' right to recognition and threaten to compound mal-distribution. Given the threat of high stakes testing, social justice education for immigrants must prepare students for these tests. However, social justice educators must work to prepare students for high stakes testing without succumbing to a curriculum dominated by Eurocentric perspectives and test preparation (Lee and Walsh 2012). Although access to academic preparation is an important form of redistribution for immigrant youth, access alone is not enough. Social justice education must also include a central component of critique so that students can be active agents in challenging injustices. Social justice education for immigrant English learns must also *recognize* students' identities by addressing issues relevant to their lives and building on their funds of knowledge to critically discuss the political, social, cultural and economic issues they face. Indeed, for immigrant youth the injustices surrounding distribution and recognition are mutually reinforcing.

Although Danny's practice did not specifically address issues related to the political dimensions of justice, Fraser's recent work (2009) would suggest that in a globalized world, social justice education needs to consider the ways in which the frame of the citizen within a neatly-bounded nation-state limits justice claims. Sassen (2001), for example, argues that the increased presence of undocumented people in global cities like New York can be attributed to structural changes in the global economy. The obstacles facing undocumented youth accentuate the political dimensions of justice, namely the lack of political participatory parity (Fraser 2009). How do the most marginalized confront the supranational forces that impact their ability to live the good life in our globalized world (Walsh 2013)? What would a curriculum that explores the complex political injustices of a globalized world look like?

The lives of Danny's students reveal the complicated and interwoven nature of injustices facing immigrants who are ELs and from low-income families. As we have argued, the students' stories indicate that a comprehensive social justice education for low-income immigrant ELs must address the interconnected nature of mal-distribution and mis-recognition. As we move forward in our work to create social justice education that addresses the reality of our globalized world, we must also grapple with how to address issues of misrepresentation.

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