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## Supervision to Deepen Teacher Candidates' Understanding of Social Justice: The Role of Responsive Mediation in Professional Development Schools

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# Supervision to Deepen Teacher Candidates' Understanding of Social Justice: The Role of Responsive Mediation in Professional Development Schools

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## Abstract

Those responsible for supervising teacher candidates have an obligation to promote socially just pedagogies. In this paper, I investigate my own supervisory practice as a novice supervisor in my mediation of a teacher candidate's understanding of social justice. I rely on a sociocultural theoretical perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) and the psychological tool of responsive mediation (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) for my supervisory practice and an anti-capitalist interpretation of socially just teaching (Apple, 2004; Ayers, 2010; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Through a microgenetic analysis (Wertsch, 1985) of a post-observation transcript, I empirically document the developmental opportunities that take place over a span of 15 minutes and how my responsive mediation shaped how the teacher candidate shifted to talking about socially just teaching differently. Implications for an expanding conception of social justice in supervision and the introduction of a theoretical perspective for the dialectical unity of supervision and teacher candidate development are discussed.

## Keywords

instructional supervision; sociocultural theory; responsive mediation; social justice; socially just teaching; supervision for social justice; neoliberalism

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## Introduction

In the months that I drafted this article, the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd flooded the news. Black Lives Matter supporters took a stand against the police state, hopefully leading to long-lasting systemic change across the United States. We saw Amy Cooper, a White woman in Central Park, abuse her dog and call the cops on an innocent Black man knowing what that phone call could lead to. Don Lemon's headline on CNN read "Two Deadly Viruses are Killing Americans: COVID-19 and Racism." There are strengthened calls for abolitionist teaching, defunding/abolishing police, and removing police from schools. For those of us who engage in supervision, what are we doing to affect change? Our students, and ourselves, are deeply affected by the racism that led to these horrific events. What will our work do to make not just schools a better place, but society as a whole?

Scholars in supervision (Glanz, 2006; Glickman et al., 2014; Nolan & Hoover, 2004; Pajak, 1993; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002) espouse a supervisory platform that calls for enhanced student learning and the creation of equitable student opportunities. In recent literature, supervision scholars have attempted to shift focus to more equity-oriented work (Lynch, 2018; Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2014; Jacobs & Casciola, 2016; Willey & Magee, 2019). Recent scholarship has also incorporated new methodological and philosophical approaches to research (Buchanan, 2018; Haberlin, 2019) and increased attention on preservice teacher preparation programs (Burns et al., 2016; Burns & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015). In doing so, these current approaches build on the foundational roots of supervision, yet, as Glanz and Zepeda (2016) point out, the field of supervision has "lingered, at best, and has remained stagnant and uninfluential at worst" (p. 1) and as Glanz and Hazi (2019) note, the field has struggled for legitimacy and visibility.

Responding to Mette's (2019) call for the future of supervision to propel forward and reclaim relevance, and in particular his call for more critical analyses of supervision and new empirical research, this paper investigates my own supervisory practice as a novice supervisor mediating a teacher candidate's understanding of socially just teaching in a post-observation debrief. I do so through an analysis of one post-observation transcript in order to empirically document the learning and developmental possibilities that take place over just a span of 15 minutes. I demonstrate how my supervision shaped how the teacher candidate began to talk about socially just teaching more critically by the end of the session. The research questions that guide this study are: 1) What is the character and quality of the supervisor's responsive mediation of the teacher candidate's development of socially just teaching? and 2) How/what does the teacher candidate take up in the supervisor's responsive mediation?

## Conceptual Framework

This section is organized around the *Supervision for Social Justice* framework put forth by Jacobs and Casciola (2016). In their 2016 article, Jacobs and Casciola first identify the strands in the supervision literature that undergird supervision for social justice. They include a moral imperative, a stance of critical inquiry, and culturally responsive supervision. Jacobs and Casciola then illustrate the process of supervision for social justice in the following sequence: 1) reflection and development of the supervisor's own lens for social justice, 2) the influence of the

supervisor's platform, knowledge, and skills on how they support teachers in supervisory tasks, and 3) the development of the teacher's platform and pedagogy for social justice. For the authors, "[t]he ultimate goal of supervision for social justice is to promote teacher learning to support change toward greater social justice" (p. 225).

In this section, I follow Jacobs & Casciola's (2016) supervision for social justice and first explicate my social justice lens as a supervisor. Following, I will introduce responsive mediation as a way to conceptualize some of the knowledge and skill base of supervision. In the Data Analysis section, the data will show, what Jacobs and Casciola (2016) explain as the third step in the process, how the teacher candidate's platform undergoes transformation from the start to the end of the conversation.

### **Supervisor Platform Development: My (Current) Social Justice Lens**

U.S. society (and even global society) is a complex political economic system built on slavery and supported through capitalism (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Hannah-Jones et al., 2019). It is impossible to isolate structures that were created in and currently exist within U.S. society. In the same way that we cannot disentangle housing, health care, or policing from our societal structure, it is impossible to understand the PreK-12 public and private educational system without understanding its place in society as well. As explained by the Kirwan Institute (2012, p. 3), "together, these structures form a system—a "web of opportunity"—and a person's location within this web significantly influences that individual's chances for happiness and success in life." Not only that, these opportunities and disadvantages accumulate over time. A systems approach allows us to recognize that the PreK-12 educational system is not broken, but it was built this way.

Educational research has well-documented structural inequalities in schooling. To name some of the disparities experienced by minoritized students: lack of representation of diverse voices (Ladson-Billings, 1995), opportunity gaps stemming from lack of access to high-quality curriculum and being negatively tracked and ability grouped (Bettie, 2014; Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2020), unequal funding and resources because of de facto segregation (Kozol, 1991), and abuse of discipline and punishment that floods the school-to-prison pipeline (Advancement Project, 2005; Hemez et al., 2019).

Yet listing the disparities and orienting towards closing this gap can set the baseline for achievement at the level of the higher-performing group; however, even the most successful groups of students are never at 100% success rates. Moreover, a concern with using a disparities approach is faulty assumptions about where to place blame (Powell, 2013, p. 3). The blame does not rest on individuals, and it should not stigmatize or reinforce negative stereotypes for those that are negatively impacted. This results in individualized, deficit beliefs that lead to supervisors asking questions like *How do we get minoritized students to care about their education?* when the question should be *How can we create an education system that values and supports the lives of minoritized students?* Instead, by taking a structural marginality perspective, we can "shift in focus from people and individuals to structures and institutions," and when we see those structures "unevenly distribute opportunities or depress life changes along the axis of race, it can be described as a structural racialization" (Powell, 2013, p. 3). It is evident that at an

institutional-level, schools stratify society in such a way that it is impossible for all students to achieve academic success, in turn reproducing class hierarchies, a central component of a capitalist society (Apple, 2004; Block, 2018; Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

Nevertheless, this critical lens is less common in preservice teacher education courses. In an analysis of the typology of multicultural education course syllabi, Gorski (2009) found that the vast majority – 73.4% – represented “conservative” or “liberal” approaches whereas only 28.9% represented critical approaches. The conservative and liberal approaches can be described as teaching the “other”, teaching with cultural sensitivity and tolerance, or teaching with multicultural competence. The critical approaches are described as teaching in a sociopolitical context or teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice. In a critical approach, the focus is on institutional analysis, consideration of the larger sociopolitical context, and engagement of critical and postcolonial theories. The goals include “engag[ing] teachers in a critical examination of the systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity, and injustice on school, from their own practice to institutional and federal education policy” while also “prepar[ing] teachers to be change agents” as well as “deconstructing and *acting against* oppression” (Gorski, 2009, p. 313, italics in original).

**Socially Just Teaching.** In line with a critical approach in teacher education preparation, at the time of this study, I envisioned socially just teacher candidates (SJ TCs) as ones who are consistently working towards the eradication of all inequalities in and of schooling through critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). In practice, I hope to see SJ TCs *begin to* both recognize and address issues of social justice when they arise at any point of the school day (Dyches & Boyd, 2017). In order to do so, they must also be able to ask questions in order to understand how and why those injustices exist by thinking beyond the four walls of the classroom. Schools are not a vacuum; they operate as a site of reproduction and are part of the same society that creates and sustains inequities (Dyches & Boyd, 2017; Love, 2019). At the same time, this allows SJ TCs to be able to understand their positioning and role in relation to the structures and institutions. They can do this by critically evaluating whose and what knowledge, habits, and values are of most worth. Constructs such as habitus and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), for example, allow SJ TCs to reflect inwards on those that hold power, and constructs such as students’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) allow for SJ TCs to validate and draw upon students’ ways of knowing and being. In other words, the goal is not to encourage superficial approaches to multiculturalism (Banks, 1993) that stop at celebrating differences among different student populations. Instead, they must begin to employ a critical approach (Gorski, 2009) in order to see and transform how oppression and power operate in schools.

To do this, SJ TCs require time and space to identify and unpack the ideologies present in our society, a capitalist/neoliberal society, and how they obfuscate the truth (Apple, 2004; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). This can, for example, lead teachers to reflect on how they have “bought into” the rhetoric of individualism, linking Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) models to economic models of capital exchange, and ranking and comparing “high” and “low” students. By being able to uncover these ideologies and work towards “unlearning” them, SJ TCs can begin to intentionally support more democratic practices as an answer to the capitalist ideologies

(Apple, 2004; Ayers, 2010). This also allows SJ TCs to see that teaching *is* a political act (Picower, 2012).

Thus, while awareness-raising is a central step in socially just teaching, it is not sufficient on its own. Socially just teaching is a form of activism (Ayers, 2016; Love, 2019; Picower, 2012). Socially just TCs must develop the ability to recognize *and* confront injustices in the classroom. They are learning to seek out root causes of inequalities and work alongside their students towards eradicating the ideologies and structures that perpetuate those inequalities (Freire, 1970).

### **Engaging in the Task of Supervision to Support Teachers' Social Justice Lens**

The knowledge base and skill base (technical, interpersonal, and pedagogical) for engaging in supervisory tasks can be linked back to several key scholars. Glickman et al. (2014) argue that supervisors must have knowledge of adult learning and teacher development, as well as interpersonal skills to build relationships and technical skills of observing, planning, and assessing effective instruction. Similarly, Costa and Garmston (2016) provide supervisors with a number of strategies for building teachers' trust. They rely on neuropsychology to piece together a frame of mediators' skills (e.g., paralinguistic skills, response behaviors, providing data, structuring conversations, mediative questioning, and maintaining trust). Burns and Badiali (2016) identify six pedagogical skills based on empirical data of supervision in professional development school partnerships: noticing, ignoring, intervening, pointing, unpacking, and processing. Jacobs and Casciola (2016) provide examples of how specific skills such as the ones mentioned above can be used for supervision for social justice.

These knowledge and skill bases have at times offered an eclectic guidebook of strategies. When not understood, selected, and used appropriately, supervisory practices are haphazardly applied, inconsistent, and/or superficial. Supervisory practices must be linked to theories of learning and development. In order to avoid these potential pitfalls, I offer *responsive mediation* (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, 2018, 2020) a concept within a sociocultural theoretical (SCT) approach (Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/2012) to provoke and explain the learning and development that takes place while engaging in supervisory tasks.

**Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Responsive Mediation.** Vygotsky's theory of mind posits that human consciousness is mediated by social interactions and activities. This includes tools (e.g., maps, blueprints, hammers) and signs, or psychological tools (e.g., languages, numeric systems) (Kozulin, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Learning and development is socially mediated, but it has to be targeted at the "ripening" stages of development; it "marches ahead of development and leads it" (Vygotsky, 1978). In the activity of targeted mediation, a zone of proximal development (ZPD) emerges (Vygotsky, 1978). A ZPD is most-commonly defined as the distance between a learner's actual development, which is what a learner can achieve on their own independently, and their potential development, which is what that same learner can achieve with expert mediation. The development that happens in this space is not simply transferred into the mind, but it goes through a psychological process of internalization and externalization of everyday and academic/scientific concepts. The character and quality of the mediation shapes and is shaped by the learners' potential development. Each learner will internalize concepts differently according to their own *perezhivanie*, the dialectical unity of emotion and cognition.

Responsive mediation takes these essential Vygotskian SCT concepts and applies them to teacher education. In other words, it is the specific form of mediation that supervisors can enact with their teacher candidates<sup>2</sup>. For supervisors, taking a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical stance necessitates targeting the mediation that supports the development and “becoming” (or transformation) of teachers, because teachers’ cognitive development is made possible by mediation of signs, social interactions, and cultural artifacts. The internalization of sound pedagogical practices and knowledge through mediation of social interaction and cultural artifacts should be a priority for supervisors. It is in the process of externalization and internalization that a supervisor can “see” a teacher candidate’s thinking.

Responsive mediation is a psychological (conceptual) tool that defines the “emergent, contingent, and responsive nature of teacher/teacher educator mediation” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 170). It is intentional and goal-directed support that “creat[es] the ‘social conditions for the development’ of L2 teacher/teaching expertise” (p. 164) so that supervisors can assist teachers as they transform their thinking. To effectively support teacher development, they must “be attuned to critical instances of teacher cognitive/emotional dissonance, recognize and capitalize on these as potential growth points, and create the conditions for responsive mediation to emerge” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 45). In other words, it focuses on the teachers’ immediate and future needs. Supervisors engage in dialogic interactions, expose teachers to psychological tools, and recognize and intentionally direct teacher thinking. Johnson and Golombek (2016) add that all of this must be done with the self-reflexivity of what teacher educators are bringing to the table as well as explicit mention of the teacher educator’s [supervisor’s] intent.

Responsive mediation has also been found in mentor teachers’ repertoire as part of mentor-mentee relationships in Masters of Teaching English as a Second Language student teaching practicums (Yoon & Kim, 2019). In their study, Yoon and Kim analyze the quality and character of the mediation provided by the mentor teachers, as opposed to just support or “assistance,” as well as the uptake on the part of the mentee (practicum teacher). Their findings support Johnson and Golombek’s claims that mediation is “dynamic and contingent upon the specific context in which mentoring occurred” and “the quality and character of mentor–mentee interactions during goal-directed activities was crucial to promoting mentees’ learning” (Yoon & Kim, 2019, p. 104). More specifically, they found that “there were multiple instances in which a ZPD emerged during the mentor-mentee meeting, and this in turn opened up structured mediational spaces in which the mentor could provide responsive mediation” (p. 104).

Though much of the work in responsive mediation has focused on language teachers’ beginning conceptions of teaching at the master’s level, it also has value for both the practices of supervision as well as learning to become a more socially just teacher. Furthermore, by grounding the work in an SCT perspective, we can understand the microgenetic, or emerging, process of learning in activity more concretely, as opposed to “after” learning activity has taken place.

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<sup>2</sup> Responsive mediation isn’t exclusive to supporting teacher candidates. Responsive mediation also supports in-service teachers, veteran and novice; however, teacher candidates in professional development schools are the focus of this study.

## Methods

The data presented in this article were analyzed through the concepts of responsive mediation and socially just teaching. This study is zoomed in on one interaction between the supervisor (myself) and just one teacher candidate (Eve) over the course of one post-observation debrief session. The research questions guiding the data analysis are 1) What is the character and quality of the supervisor's responsive mediation of one teacher candidate's development of socially just teaching? And 2) How/what does the teacher candidate take up in the supervisor's responsive mediation?

I enacted the *function*, but not the *role* (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Nolan & Hoover, 2004) of a supervisor in a long-standing district-wide K-4 professional development school (PDS). In other words, I participated in many of the same activities as the other formal supervisors within the PDS; I co-planned and co-taught in the PDS Spring seminar course that focused on practitioner inquiry, social justice, identity, and teacher leadership. I supervised five PDS teacher candidates bi-weekly. My supervision was in addition to the official supervision by their designated supervisor. The PDS context that I was part of was a learning community that was open to all interested partners. As a graduate student from the PDS's university partner, I was welcomed into the PDS community as a learner and a teacher educator, though my assistantship duties were in a different school-university-community partnership. Throughout the year that this study took place, the teacher candidates readily approached me with questions related to social justice. They also knew that while I was not evaluating them officially, I held the status of a supervisor and had expertise that they valued.

### Context, Participants, and Data Collection

This article provides an in-depth analysis of one post-observation debrief session with one PDS teacher candidate, Eve, a White, monolingual, middle-class woman. Eve was placed in a suburban/rural, third-grade classroom in Bridgeview Elementary<sup>3</sup> for her yearlong student teaching experience (August-May). The lesson I observed was in early February. It was a science lesson centered on the question "What kinds of materials will complete the electric circuit?" In our prior debrief, Eve and I had discussed what she wanted me to observe. She was interested in her interaction with two specific students; thus, during the observation, I took fieldnotes on those specific interactions and on what else was happening in the classroom. I returned to Eve's classroom at the end of the day for our debrief. Our debrief lasted for nearly 37 minutes. For the first 19 minutes, we discussed my fieldnotes and observations related to her original concern. Then I suggested to Eve that there were two other social justice-related concerns that we could address if she were interested.

The data analysis that follows addresses one of the social justice issues I had documented in my observation notes and subsequently raised in the debrief: *the school-wide awards system for perfect attendance*. Approximately 10 minutes into my observation of Eve's science lesson, the

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<sup>3</sup> 6.3% of students in Bridgeview identify as Asian, 4.7% as Black, 2.9% as Hispanic, 8.1% as two or more races, and the remaining 78.1% identify as White. Bridgeview identifies 12% of students as requiring special education services, 5.5% are classified as English Language Learners, and 27.7% are categorized as economically-disadvantaged.



building principal entered the room to announce that he had award slips for perfect attendance in January. He called out the names of students who earned an attendance award that month to gather for a photo. The principal comments that Eve and her mentor teacher's class had the second highest attendance record in the school for January. He mentions that the class that has the highest attendance rate has a student with a severe allergy and because they wash their hands constantly at every transition, they are never sick. After award-winning students are showered with praise, the lesson returns to normal.

## Findings

What follows are findings from a microgenetic analysis of the debrief conversation on attendance between Eve and me. A microgenetic analysis affords the researcher the opportunity to look for signs of transformation because it is focused on development as it unfolds, *in situ* (Cross, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). In a moment-by-moment analysis, the researcher is able to look for qualitative shifts in the way the teacher candidate is thinking, looking for the genesis of new activity or thinking. A microgenetic analysis is well-suited for supervisors inquiring into when changes in thinking and/or practice emerges in order to reflect upon and improve their practice and better understand specific mechanisms for change.

In this analysis, I identify moments in which Eve demonstrates, and does not demonstrate, qualitative shifts in her thinking of attendance as a social justice issue. I use these moments to analyze the quality and character of my responsive mediation to the extent that it limits and supports Eve's development.

Bolded lines in the excerpt transcript are ones that are central to the excerpt and taken up in the analytical text that follows. Within several excerpts in italicized Times New Roman are summaries of speech that were not included in order to keep excerpts focused; these are primarily classroom and personal anecdotes that Eve uses to think through our discussion. Excerpt 1 begins immediately after I say that I think there is a connection between social justice and the attendance award system, but do not indicate what I think that suggestion might be. I wanted to first offer Eve the opportunity to externalize her thinking about how the two might be connected before I provide her with my answer.

### *Excerpt 1*

- 1 Eve: Okay I was gonna say I think about it and I, because I  
 2 know where <the principal's> coming from because they  
 3 went to, all the principals went to something over the  
 4 summer and they found, this is just from what I've  
 5 heard from Dana [Mentor teacher], they found that you  
 6 need to be at school to learn to get better grades, to  
 7 do better which makes sense because you're coming to  
 8 school  
 9 Megan: Yeah, if you're there, great

- 10 E: like good attendance, great **but the giving out like**  
 11 **the PAWS tickets and the attendance slips in front of**  
 12 **everyone else too. I don't... Like what do you-**  
 13  
 14 *[Omitted: Eve briefly recounts four attendance issues in her class. Two students*  
 15 *went to great lengths to get perfect attendance (including “gaming the system”).*  
 16 *Two are often late because of the parents. She hypothesizes that two concerns are*  
 17 *1) getting to school and 2) that a lot of it rests on the family to get students to*  
 18 *school.]*  
 19  
 20 E: I don't know. If they miss one day of school for a  
 21 doctor's appointment or to spend time with your fam- I  
 22 don't know. I don't know. I don't know how to feel  
 23 about it.  
 24 M: **And so to complicate things, think about it in**  
 25 **reverse. Who has the privilege to stay home from**  
 26 **school?**  
 27 E: Oh good poi- yeah people who don't have to work.

This is Eve's first attempt at linking social justice to attendance. On lines 10-12, she states her initial concern with the attendance award system: giving out the slips “in front of everyone else too.” In other words, it is not fair that some students are being awarded in front of others who were unable to earn the award. In this exchange, and in her examples, I interpret her understanding that attendance award systems can be inequitable because not every student can earn one (line 12). She attempts to advocate for the students not getting awarded and does not want them to feel badly but is not quite sure in her thinking (lines 15-16). This line of thinking is common when equity work is based in the notion of accepting “diversity” (Gorski, 2009; Picower, 2012). Instead of changing the systems and structures that perpetuate inequalities, an “accepting diversity” approach recognizes inequitable experiences and outcomes, but attempts to reframe them as “differences, not deficits.” In this excerpt, Eve is not yet able to externalize that the system of attendance awards and the ideology it is built upon is flawed, I intentionally ask a prompting question (lines 17-19) in an attempt to create cognitive dissonance so that a growth point can emerge. I identified a missing component in Eve's application of social justice, and thus, asked a question to responsively mediate her thinking. This intentional act creates the opportunity for Eve to realize that my question brings a new consideration, as indicated on line 20. By her pausing on line 20 and saying “oh good poi[nt]”, her language indicates that this is an angle she had previously not considered and serves to contrast her initial understanding at the start of the excerpt. As a new supervisor, I might not have recognized the power of this question until analyzing the transcription of the debrief at a microgenetic level. It is in this case that we can see my question as a supervisor opened a space for something new.

In Excerpt 2, we see Eve talk through several examples as a way to externalize this new way of thinking. Excerpt 2 begins after Eve extends her thought of “people who don't have to work” (line 20) by talking through two examples of students that have the privilege to stay home because their parents work or because they take extended vacations.

**Excerpt 2**

1 Eve: Like these people have a lot of money and they can  
 2 stay. My mom was like, "you have to go because I need  
 3 to go to work every day.  
 4 Megan: I don't have a babysitter. I don't have a nanny. I  
 5 don't have a flexible job where I even take care of  
 6 the day off.

*[Omitted: Eve shares an example of one of her student's living in a single parent home and the limits of being able to stay home.]*

7 M: So that's what I think is so fascinating about the  
 8 attendance thing because **it's not just the kids that**  
 9 **come from privilege backgrounds that get those. Yeah,**  
 10 **but they're also the ones that are able to miss**  
 11 **school.**  
 12 E: Yeah,  
 13 M: It just reminds me of this idea of 'you can't miss  
 14 work, right?'. You have to be there.  
 15 E: I was just reading about this! I was reading something  
 16 on Facebook about this yesterday because there are  
 17 certain jobs that are getting paid barely anything.  
 18 You have to go to work every day because you need to  
 19 make a living and they don't. I worked at [Fast Food  
 20 Chain] for six and a half years and I've never called  
 21 out sick, and I've gone there with poison ivy all over  
 22 my arms. I've gone there with strep.

*[Omitted: Eve relates back to hometown friends in the restaurant industry that can't miss work if their kids are sick, can't afford babysitters, etc.]*

23 M: Yeah, I think we were probably seeing the same  
 24 articles and same tweets because it's been all over  
 25 the past few days. Making connections to coronavirus<sup>4</sup>,  
 26 where it's, 'Honestly? I can't afford to be  
 27 quarantined for three weeks. So, if I get corona  
 28 virus, I'm spreading it because yeah, I can't miss  
 29 work for three weeks or I can't pay rent and then  
 30 boom. I'm homeless right?'  
 31 E: Yep

*[Omitted: Eve recalls an instance with her and her sister being sick and needing shifts covered without being penalized.]*

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<sup>4</sup> Because this conversation was in early 2020, the term used for what we now call COVID-19 at the time was "coronavirus."

32 M: It's just ridiculous.

At this point, Eve has taken up the idea that the attendance system may be immaterial to students who come from privileged backgrounds able to miss school. She contrasts this with her own experiences and recalls her mother telling her “you have to go because I need to go to work every day” (lines 2-3). Her previous understanding was that the only students *not* awarded were the ones that had “less than ideal” home lives. On lines 15-22, we see that she is able to extend the conversation to outside of school, to social media and workplace culture.

Eve and I are co-constructing meaning of the discourses and ideologies we hear in a capitalist society (i.e., you can't miss work). Employees cannot miss work, or they cannot live. Being able to survive is tied to not losing your job(s). You go to work even if you are sick. This belief is indoctrinated in those as young as kindergarten aged. Schooling is compulsory – and for good reason – but awards systems and the evolving rationalizations for requiring students to attend school have shifted. The argument is now more akin to “incentivizing workers” rather than “school as a safe place for development”. As Eve provides personal examples (some omitted as related to friends in her hometown and relatives) of not calling in at service industry jobs even when employees are sick, this excerpt marks an initial shift in Eve's thinking as she begins to link the concept of attendance to a critical perspective of work productivity and labor value. However, these connections for Eve might not have been possible if as the supervisor, I hadn't picked up on her line about needing to go to work every day, sympathizing with workers under capitalism, and added the line “It just reminds me of this idea of ‘you can't miss work, right?’. You have to be there” (lines 12-13).

### *Excerpt 3*

1 Megan: **Yeah, but then we're already teaching that habit and**  
2 **that behavior with kindergarteners. Like starting**  
3 **from, you need to be at school every day and you have**  
4 **to learn every single day that you're here and it's-**  
5 M: =Yeah there's this contradiction of you have to be at  
6 school every day, but=  
7 Eve: =but then there's the teacher  
8 telling you=  
9 M: =can't do this thing if you're sick  
10 E: And me and [Mentor teacher] say stay at home  
11 M: Yeah  
12 E: If you can stay home, please do, but it's also we  
13 don't-  
14 M: What matters more?  
15 E: Exactly!  
16 M: What is shown to matter more. Yeah.  
17 E: There's so much that goes into it, uh-huh.

Continuing from the last line in excerpt 2, I bring the conversation back into the classroom in order to make a direct link between what students learn in school and how that is reflected in broader society (lines 1-4). Eve takes up what we have said about workplace culture and school

culture regarding attendance thus far, and we are aligning in what we perceive to be a contradiction between our (and Eve's mentor teacher's) beliefs about staying home when sick with what both society and schools demand of people. It is in this contradiction that we unpack the ideologies behind the attendance award system and the ideologies we want to inform our policies. On lines 12-13, Eve states the contradiction, "if you can stay home, please do, but it's also we don't-" While her voice trails off after "we don't," we can see that she notices the contradiction but perhaps does not know what to make of it yet. Restating my question "*What matters more?*" to "*What is shown to matter more?*" allows the space for both ideas to be true (stay home when sick vs. don't miss school) while also creating a new "crack" in the façade of a school, at a systemic level, being inherently good and in our students' and society's best interest.

#### Excerpt 4

1 Megan: Yeah, now you can tell [the principal] 'Don't give  
2 these slips out in my class.' ((sarcastic tone))  
3 Eve: Well I would love to talk- maybe I'll talk to him  
4 about that. I'm just curious what he thinks...  
5 M: Or what if there's another- **what if it's caring more**  
6 **about the community than caring about yourself because**  
7 **it's- centered is this individual thing and it's you**  
8 **as an individual that matters more than your group.**  
9 **Nobody in your community wants to be sick, so let's**  
10 **reward things that we're doing daily, personal=**  
11 E: **=Being**  
12 **safe, yeah**  
13 M: ((teacher voice)) I caught you washing your hands. I  
14 caught you blowing your nose. I caught you covering  
15 your mouth when you were sneezing.  
16 E: Yeah  
17 M: ((teacher voice)) What are you doing to help the  
18 community? Oh, you wiped down your table with Lysol  
19 wipes, we're doing our part together as a community.  
20 But if someone's sick, then we know that it's okay and  
21 we want them to be better.  
22 E: Yeah  
23 M: because right now it's like 'Oh you're not allowed to  
24 be sick.'  
25 E: **Yeah, you're not allowed to be. [FEMALE STUDENT 1],**  
26 **for example, gets stressed because she can't miss**  
27 **school because yeah and then they get upset and like**  
28 **they're=**  
29 M: **=You are eight years old!**  
30 E: Yeah!  
31 M: You are allowed to be sick yes even at 20-something,  
32 at 30-something. You're allowed to be sick.

This excerpt is key. Recognizing that Eve is now dissatisfied with the current attendance award policy, on lines 1-2, I sarcastically introduce the notion of telling her principal to not give the slips out. While this was not an ideal approach, it opened a space for me to gauge what sort of action steps Eve might have been considering. I pick up on Eve's inclination to learn the reasoning behind the attendance award system and her inability to provide a successful interpretation. I decided to interject with a possibility for what it *could be*.

While the mediation up to this point in the debrief has been more implicit, on lines 10-15, I introduce a more explicit understanding of what a socially just interpretation of attendance would look like. I introduce my vision for social justice by building on the concepts of community aid and care as it relates to attendance in an everyday, practical sense.

Eve completes my statement on lines 11-12 with the notion of "being safe" and she expresses agreement throughout; both of which signal that she understands and is in agreement with how I articulated a socially just attendance policy. On lines 13-15 and 17-19, we can see my use of teacher voice to model what a socially just teacher might say related to students being sick and missing school. By co-constructing a new vision and making it as concrete as possible, Eve is able to have an ideal representation, a goal to work towards. Additionally, Eve picks up on my dissatisfaction of the current policy that promotes an ideology of work over health/wellness and recognizes how that policy is negatively affecting students (lines 26-28). This excerpt demonstrates a shift in Eve's interpretation of a just attendance award system – she is no longer trying to advocate for each student to earn an award but critically questioning the function of the award policy and what it is reinforcing to students.

### *Excerpt 5*

1 E: I'm curious, do all the elementary schools do that or  
2 is it just ours?

*[Omitted: We spend time clarifying the policies at different schools in the district. Eve evaluates her principal's decision to send out emails to families, but notes it isn't affecting kids, it just "teach[es] them that it's not okay to miss school."]*

3 E: =I'm really curious. If I could talk to him, I don't  
4 know, yeah just like see what he says.  
5 M: Just figure out like why attendance is important=  
6 E: =the reward  
7 M: And **why that reward** I mean, we used to get perfect  
8 attendance=  
9 E: =that's what I- in elementary school that was my goal,  
10 to get it perfect because we get awards at the end of  
11 the year.  
12 M: Exactly. Like I want as many as possible.  
13 E: Yeah and it's cool that you're in school all the time,  
14 but also, I was probably sick some of those days and  
15 should've stayed home, right.

16 M: Yeah, well it and **that's what I think I want us to**  
 17 **keep talking about in seminar. These things that we've**  
 18 **grown up with that we have not questioned for the vast**  
 19 **majority of our lives. We're now realizing it's not**  
 20 **okay, and how do we push it a little bit? How do we**  
 21 **change it? You can't just flip the world upside down**  
 22 **overnight but even recognizing attendance as being an**  
 23 **issue that privileges certain students or certain**  
 24 **students are unfairly penalized...**

Again, Eve questions the intent behind the attendance award system and wishes to seek guidance from her principal. I support her wish to ask the principal, but I also ask her to think on her own experiences as a reminder that the idea of awarding/rewarding “good” attendance is not a new phenomenon. The two of us come together and reminisce on our own experiences with seeking attendance awards, which provides me with the opportunity to explicitly bridge our discussions in the student teaching seminar that I co-taught to the practical activity in the classroom. This post-observation debrief occurred in between Seminar sessions that centered on understanding personal biases and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977). As evidenced in the next excerpt, Eve does not take up the discussion of *habitus* or personal biases any further than recognizing past experiences, perhaps indicating that she has not yet internalized the focus of the seminar sessions so far or that she was still focused on imagining a new, more just attendance award system.

### **Excerpt 6**

1 Eve: Yeah.  
 2 It'd be cool to, in the classroom, to do something. I  
 3 **like that idea of doing that community kind of thing.**  
 4 **If it was like your table community, you're a little**  
 5 **table community like in our classroom and keep- I**  
 6 **don't want to say keep track of points, but how you're**  
 7 **saying like, 'Oh great job for covering your nose or**  
 8 **covering your mouth whenever you cough. Point for blue**  
 9 **table and at the end of the month, see who had the**  
 10 **most points? I don't know if that would be..?**  
 11 Megan: Yeah  
 12 E: I think that'd be kind of cool to do as a community  
 13 kind of thing just to even yeah,  
 14 ...  
 15 M: Even asking them ((*teacher voice*)) 'Are you feeling  
 16 okay today? Are you feeling a little sick? if you're  
 17 feeling a little sick, what can we do? Well, do you  
 18 need more water? Let's make sure that [student] is  
 19 getting enough water today. Let's check in on him and  
 20 be a good neighbor. Be a good friend.'  
 21 E: Yeah. That would be really cool to do.  
 22 M: That's my whole thing. Moving us from individuals to  
 23 this collective.

- 24 E: Yeah  
 25 M: Community of people that care about each other and  
 26 support each other together.  
 27 E: Yeah.

In this exchange, Eve has taken up my suggestion from earlier. She might be responding to my question “how do we change it?” It is also clear that she is at the ripening stages of development as she is not entirely confident in what that vision would look like. As shown on lines 2-10, she recognizes that a point system would be similar in competition and external awards/privileges but is not able to externalize an alternative. I again voice an ideal of what that language and policy could sound like. I conclude by reiterating a vision of socially just teaching (lines 22-23 & 25-26). To get to this point, we had to start by problematizing the current attendance award system, ask who the award system is privileging, connect the school policy as a microcosm of greater society, and consider alternatives to the attendance policy at a practical and theoretical level.

### **Discussion**

In this study, I detail how I attempted to provoke a teacher candidate’s development of socially just teaching by discussing “everyday” classroom practices as seen through a social justice lens. As such, I analyzed excerpts from approximately 15 minutes of a debrief following my observation of the teacher candidate in a science lesson. This data analysis afforded the opportunity to investigate both the character and quality of my responsive mediation as well as the microgenetic ways in which the teacher candidate takes up my responsive mediation during our debrief.

My responsive mediation of Eve’s development in becoming a socially just teacher was dynamic and contingent upon the content and events of the observed lesson. The interruption of the attendance rewards provided the practical, material connections to the theoretical definition of social justice. A different set of circumstances would have led to a different conversation. I opened up a structured mediational space by posing the question of a possible link between social justice and attendance and asked Eve to first share what such a link might be. This allowed me to see what sort of mediation might be needed within her ZPD (e.g., asking one particular question over another). By noticing that Eve’s initial connection mirrored a more conservative or “liberal” approach of “celebrating diversity” to social justice work (Gorski, 2009; Picower, 2012), I was able to take Eve’s understanding and mediate her growth towards a more “critical” approach to social justice work. To mediate this shift, I started with more implicit feedback (e.g., posing the question “Who has the privilege to stay home from school?” in Excerpt 1) and moved to more explicit feedback (e.g., in Excerpt 4 when I interject with an alternative attendance policy) when it was clear that Eve was not yet able to take up or externalize something beyond what she already knew. Similarly, I did not start by sharing answers or giving solutions, rather Eve and I worked to co-construct meaning over the course of the debrief. In doing so, we can see that my responsive mediation cannot be reduced to a predetermined, lockstep pathway and that it uses the knowledge and skills of the supervisor to guide/promote development by meeting Eve where she was.



Because of the responsive mediation provided, by the end of the debrief, Eve was able to state her preference for an attendance policy that valued community over the individual in favor of community health being the goal and a rejection of reinforcing and rewarding unearned privilege. There is a beginning recognition that individuals' needs should not be prioritized over the community, but in relationship to them. She made connections to broader society and how workplace culture in a capitalist system is analogous to student attendance. Because of the way I engaged Eve and drew on my understanding of social justice as well as my knowledge and skills as a novice supervisor, Eve's language indicates a markedly different conceptualization of attendance as (in)equitable from what she articulated at the start of the debrief. While she is still operating within the current school system (e.g., suggesting table groups get points), her ideological shift indicates the potential for a growing dissatisfaction of the current school system and willingness to seek out alternatives (e.g., excerpt 6, lines 8-10, 12-13) and her expressed hesitation about table groups getting points after suggesting it and then suggesting another alternative. Changing the policies, conditions, and habits of school that actively work against a communal, democratic society is part of a critical pedagogy that teachers supervising for social justice should support their teacher candidates in doing. To this end, Eve demonstrated her desire to speak with her principal. She deferred to her building principal multiple times in our debrief, seeking to understand what his decision-making might have been for the award system. Having the courage to speak out about unjust policies and enact change while developing a more complex vision of social justice in education, is precisely what a socially just teacher candidate should be *learning* to do.

### **Limitations**

Yet, in spite of this growth and development at the microgenetic level across the debrief, the evidence to which the development extends beyond the debrief is not available. Consequently, there are several limitations to this study. The most significant was that a classroom-based follow-up was not possible. In the week after the observation and debrief, the school district went on Spring Break and before students could return after the break, the school district went remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Without follow-up, there is no evidence that can speak to whether or not Eve's practice or thinking about her practice changed as a result, or whether her practice informed her development of understanding socially just teaching in other instances than attendance awards. Furthermore, this was my first semester enacting the functions of a supervisor. I had previously taught undergraduate courses and have been a classroom mentor teacher, but I was a novice supervisor. Because of this, there are missteps and missed opportunities in the data, which speaks to the first research question, the character and quality of my responsive mediation. For instance, my sarcastic response in Excerpt 4 could have been restated; however, Eve does a great job of taking up my sarcastic suggestion and framing it more positively. Yet by analyzing my own practices through the lens of responsive mediation, I am also able to make improvements for future practice.

### **Conclusion**

This paper contributes a nuanced, critical interpretation of socially just teaching. It extends beyond outdated notions of equality and equity, beyond calls for celebration of diversity and more representation. Supervision demands an evolving, more complex understanding of social

justice. My debrief with Eve elicited an evolving stance of socially just teaching that recognizes acts of injustice embedded in the underlying policies of schooling, links current school practices to the neoliberal political economy, examines who has power and privilege in what spaces, and imagines alternatives. Though a conversation on attendance awards may not radically change or abolish systems within the school district in which Eve is a teacher candidate, it indicates a step forward in more socially just teaching and supervision.

This study is poised to contribute uniquely to the field of supervision theoretically, methodologically, and practically. An SCT grounding provides those that enact the role of supervision to “to identify where teachers are and what their potential may be, and then to create structured mediational spaces in which they can reach their potential, transforming themselves in the process” (Johnson & Golombek, 2018, p. 452). In praxis, we can consider responsive mediation as a psychological tool (Johnson & Golombek, 2018) to “examine the quality and character of the dialogic interactions that we set up intentionally and emerge moment-by-moment in our practices” (p. 452). Methodologically, a microgenetic analysis of one’s own responsive mediation can both generate new knowledge about the practices of supervision, but also provide novice supervisors an opportunity to study one’s own practices, make their work public and open it up to closer scrutiny (Johnson & Golombek, 2018). The findings in this study remind us that supervisors play a crucial role in influencing the thinking and practices of those they supervise. Over a span of only 15-minutes, my responsive mediation created the conditions for Eve to shift in the way she talked about and asked questions of the attendance award policy. This documented shift in such a short period of time can have significant implications when taken in conjunction with the pedagogical skills and pathways of supervisors (Burns & Badiali, 2016, 2018).

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