

Article

“It Is Not a Question of if Anymore, It Is a Question of When”: Teacher Emotions and Visions of Identity-Conscious Teaching

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Abstract: This paper presents the findings from a qualitative analysis of teacher writing samples collected during a graduate-level, online course exploring issues of equity and identity in education. These writing samples discussed teachers’ perceptions and emotions relating to teaching experiences and imaginations. The concepts of critical emotional praxis and teacher visioning are engaged in analysis to explore teachers’ emotions. Findings elucidate the complexity of encouraging and challenging emotions experienced by teachers regarding identity-conscious teaching in today’s sociopolitical environment.

Keywords: teacher education; teacher emotions; contentious issues; culturally responsive teaching

1. Introduction

Amidst decades of research supporting and informing equity pedagogies, political rhetoric presents new challenges for teachers engaging inclusive and responsive pedagogies. Political positions—especially in education—have moved to the poles as politicization has intensified (Houston, 2024). This is especially noticeable in issues of race, culture, and identity in education (e.g., Associated Press, 2021; Glueck & Mazzei, 2022; Schwartz, 2021). Therefore, scholars and practitioners in teacher education have a responsibility to understand what it means to teach in today’s political context and what kinds of support teachers may now need.

This paper presents the findings from a qualitative analysis of teacher writing samples collected during a graduate-level, online course exploring identity-conscious teaching (Talusán, 2022). These writing samples discussed teachers’ perceptions and emotions relating to teaching experiences and imaginations. The concepts of critical emotional praxis (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2009) and teacher visioning (Hammerness, 2001, 2003, 2006) are engaged in analysis to explore teachers’ emotions related to critical and responsive teaching in today’s complex sociopolitical environment.

2. Literature Review

Culturally responsive pedagogies are frequently emphasized in preservice and in-service teacher education coursework. However, recent research paints a complex picture of how these practices are positioned within broader sociopolitical contexts.

2.1. Identity and Culture in Teacher Education

Despite some confusion and inconsistency in ideas and terms related to social justice in teaching (Chang & Cochran-Smith, 2022), the field of teacher education has improved its interpretation and application of cultural teaching theories. Among the most influential frameworks are Ladson-Billings’s (1992, 1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, Gay’s (2018)



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culturally responsive teaching, [Paris and Alim's \(2017\)](#) culturally sustaining pedagogy, and [McCarty and Lee's \(2014\)](#) culturally sustaining/revitalizing teaching, as well as antiracist ([Pollock, 2008](#)) and abolitionist ([Love, 2019](#)) approaches. Teacher education presents numerous unique opportunities for studying and modeling transformative structures, practices, and policies (e.g., [Sabati et al., 2022](#)). While these frameworks carry important distinctions and implications, in this manuscript, I primarily use the umbrella term identity-conscious teaching to refer to any teaching that is considerate of student identity, positionality, and culture while taking a self-aware, identity-conscious stance ([Talusán, 2022](#)). This term is also named in the primary course text (see: [Talusán, 2022](#)). I do not intend for this to gloss over the distinctions but hope it will provide appropriate space for discussing my participants' emotions and experiences.

Scholars in teacher education have expanded their application to consider all manner of teacher preparation topics, including teacher dispositions ([Bondy et al., 2017](#)), field or internship experiences ([Hollins, 2015](#)), program structures ([Hollins & Warner, 2021](#)), language and literacy instruction ([Briceño & Rodríguez-Mojica, 2022](#); [Martin & Spencer, 2020](#); [Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2019](#)), and professional learning across the career continuum ([Rutten et al., 2024](#)). Those cited here and innumerable others have accomplished great strides in the development of a teacher workforce that is more culturally competent and responsive to student assets. Furthermore, teacher education provides fertile ground for the cultivation of socioculturally conscious teachers. Other researchers have noted that teacher education programs play an important role in supporting teachers' ability to facilitate "critical conversations" and "democratic action" ([Carter Andrews et al., 2018](#)), enact justice-oriented teaching ([Reagan et al., 2016](#)), and seize upon current events ([Hallman et al., 2022](#)) for the betterment of schools and society. Graduate teacher education programs carry particular potential. They can help teachers develop new ideas about access and inclusion ([Tournaki & Samuels, 2016](#)) and can increase teachers' understanding of multiculturalism ([Hasslen & Bacharach, 2007](#); [Wiseman & Fox, 2010](#)). Furthermore, even when external accountability structures do not prioritize it, teacher educators have noted the revitalizing potential for themselves and the teachers they serve ([Olson & Craig, 2012](#)).

2.2. Increasing Challenges

However, [Ladson-Billings \(2021\)](#) has noted that the popularity of the theory of culturally responsive pedagogy has led to some misunderstandings and misdirections. For example, teacher educators "rarely demonstrate such work in their own teaching and teacher education students and novice teachers report struggling with implementation of the theory in their own practice" (p. 352). Further complicating the enactment of critical and responsive teaching is the current sociopolitical environment. As political polarization has increased, so too have challenges to analyses of historical and social inequities in education ([Brezicha et al., 2023](#); [Crenshaw, 2021](#)). This poses challenges for teacher education, teacher educators, and teachers. For example, teachers grapple with when it is best to speak out or remain neutral ([Geller, 2020](#)), how or whether to handle "unplanned" controversies ([Cassar et al., 2021, 2023](#)), and how to minimize the negative impact of heated discourse inside and outside of the classroom ([Pace, 2019](#)).

Teachers' knowledge, morals, and emotions play an important role in the enactment of critical and responsive teaching. For example, [Cassar et al. \(2023\)](#) found that teachers' agentic uptake of specific controversial issues was related to their perception of the social import of the issue. Further, Buehler and colleagues found that enactments of culturally competent teaching can be both emotionally and cognitively challenging for teachers ([Buehler et al., 2009](#)), highlighting the need for education and contextual support. Other researchers found that white teachers and school leaders, in particular, struggle in discussing race and racism,

resulting in avoidance or other negative consequences (Gere et al., 2009; Haviland, 2008). Unfortunately, as political divisions grow, teachers may feel less and less comfortable, even if they felt their initial preparation was supportive (Ranschaert, 2023).

However, the values of teacher education and the rich diversity of our communities demand a teacher workforce that is equipped with critical sociocultural consciousness and culturally responsive pedagogies (Zwicky & Walls, 2020), as well as more research exploring teachers' emotions, identities, and vulnerabilities in justice-oriented teaching (Cassar et al., 2021).

3. Theoretical Framework

Teacher emotions and conceptualizations of critical teaching were central to the data and analysis for this study. To contextualize my analysis, I first provide a summary of theoretical framing of "emotions" in teaching. Second, because the writing samples used as data for this study included both reflections or recollections of past experiences and imaginations of future or hypothetical teaching, I engage two theories in my analysis of teacher writing samples: critical emotional praxis (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2009) and teacher visions (Hammerness, 2001, 2003, 2006). Both support consideration of teachers' thoughts and emotions in relation to justice-oriented teaching.

3.1. Emotions in Teaching

Given that teachers' emotions are complex, multidimensional, context dependent, and socially implicated, no precise definition is consistently used across all literature examining the topic (Chen, 2020). However, one may consider the definition posed by Farouk (2012), who asserted that teacher emotions are "internalized sensations . . . integral to the ways in which [teachers] relate to and interact with their students, colleagues, and parents" (Farouk, 2012, p. 491). While it is important to note that a dichotomous framing of teacher emotions is somewhat reductive (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), research does tend to frame them in categories such as positive/negative for discussion and classification (Chen, 2020). In this paper, I use the categories of "encouraging" and "challenging" to capture the nuances of teacher emotions.

That said, my understanding of the import and operationalization of emotions in identity-conscious teaching is influenced by the work of Zembylas (2003, 2004, 2007, 2020). Zembylas asserts that emotions are related to teachers' conceptualizations of their identity and indicative of power relations (2003) and are an integral part of the "ecology" of pedagogical content knowledge and teaching practices (Zembylas, 2007). Further, the complexities, tensions, and challenges of teaching often relate to three major emotional categories: evaluative, relational, and political (Zembylas, 2004). However, research often undervalues the power of unhappy emotions in the pursuit of social justice education, which can be just as productive (Zembylas, 2020). Therefore, I consider emotions to be indicative of tensions or inspiration, potential action or catalysts for transformation in the pursuit of justice-oriented teaching.

3.2. Critical Emotional Praxis

Critical emotional praxis (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2009) is one frame for exploring teacher emotions in identity-conscious teaching. This involves (1) questioning how emotions signal, fuel, or inhibit privilege and marginalization in schools and society; (2) unpacking how emotions shape teaching contexts and vice-versa; and (3) exploring how emotional understandings shape relationships, pedagogies, and policies. It further posits that emotion is a constructive force in teaching and learning, helping to form and maintain justice or injustice. Critical emotional praxis is a form of

critical praxis (Freire, 1955/1970) informed by emotion leveraged to resist unjust structures and practices.

Further, critical emotional praxis acknowledges how teachers' emotions are a powerful force; they can be complex and contradictory, serving to impede or empower transformation. Throughout their argumentation of critical emotional praxis, Chubbuck and Zembylas (2008) note that teachers can experience negative emotions such as fear, guilt, anger, grief, disappointment, and humiliation in considerations and enactments of social justice education. However, positive emotions are also possible, such as hope, possibility, passion, and happiness. Other, less easily categorized emotions such as vulnerability and empowerment are also mentioned.

3.3. *Visioning in Teaching*

To conceptualize teachers' imaginations of identity-conscious teaching, I also engage Hammerness' (2001, 2003, 2006) concept of teacher visions. Hammerness theorizes teacher visions as images or imaginations of classroom practice, including goals or ideals. Analysis of visions can support critical analysis of teachers' self-reflections, including their understanding of teaching goals in relation to current contexts. This can include analysis of gaps or distances between what teachers hope for or imagine and what transpires (Hammerness, 2006). I utilize Hammerness' concept of teacher visions and visioning to frame my analysis of writing samples featuring imaginations of future or possible justice-oriented teaching.

4. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study was designed to examine teacher emotions associated with justice-oriented teaching in the current sociopolitical context. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. When discussing identity-conscious teaching, what emotions do teachers cite in one collection of MA course writing samples?
2. What do teacher emotions mentioned in these writing samples reveal about their experiences with identity-conscious teaching in today's sociopolitical environment?

4.1. *Context and Participants*

Data for this qualitative study were taken from student submissions of course assignments and discussion board contributions in an asynchronous online teaching Master's (MA) course taught during one sixteen-week semester by the author at a large, teaching-focused, public university in one midwestern state in the U.S.A. Students engaged with the course weekly, completing modules, participating in discussions, and submitting work. Students in the course were practicing classroom teachers and one school librarian (who also had classroom teaching experience). The course was required for most of the students' MA program coursework and was designed to lead students in an investigation of issues relating to equity, identity, and diversity in U.S. school settings. A critical, identity-conscious lens framed coursework and materials. Course topics were explored in the context of the students' own teaching experience with framing from the course text (Talusán, 2022) and publications or media featuring current educational research on course topics/subtopics (e.g., articles, book chapters, podcasts, recorded lectures, or webinars). Participant demographics are provided in Appendix A.

As the author/researcher/instructor for this study, I acknowledge my role as participant-researcher. This positionality afforded me an immersive and informed perspective on the research context, which also provided a deeper understanding of the setting and participant perspectives (Pinnegar & Quiles-Fernández, 2018). However, I acknowledge that this vantage also shaped my researcher "lens" and required that I maintained careful

reflection of my own biases and blind spots. For example, I was invested in my students' own well-being and the development of their critical perspectives for identity-conscious teaching. I address other potential limitations to this perspective in the final section of this article.

Of the 13 students enrolled in the course, 10 volunteered to participate in the study. A recruitment letter outlining the purpose and procedures of the study was sent to the entire class a few weeks before the end of the semester. Students had the opportunity to ask questions prior to deciding whether to submit consent to participate. Students were made aware that their choice to participate was entirely optional and would not be known to the researcher until after grades were completed. Informed consent was collected prior to the start of the study. After grades were submitted for the semester, I (the researcher/author) received a list of the names of students who volunteered to participate in the study via electronic consent form. Participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 15 years.

4.2. Data Sources

Data for this study were collected from three types of participant course assignments (referred to as "writing samples") submitted to the online learning management system: first, a series of six online discussion board contributions that totaled approximately 70 participant writing samples (i.e., individual, original responses to instructor prompt) and replies (i.e., participants' replies to at least two classmates' responses); second, 40 reflective journal submissions (i.e., appx. 500-word writing samples on a course topic/subtopic); and third, each of the 10 participants' final projects, which consisted of a participant analysis of an issue of educational equity present in their professional context.

4.3. Analysis

[Saldaña \(2016\)](#) guides qualitative researchers in analysis using emotion as a signal of significance. Informed by this methodological perspective and procedures outlined in [Saldaña's \(2016\)](#) manual for qualitative coding, I first coded all participant writing samples that discussed participants' experiences, perceptions, or emotions related to identity-conscious teaching. This first round of analysis resulted in the following emotion codes: comfort, resolve, bravery, empathy, discomfort, uncertainty, shame, fear, regret, disappointment, anger, horror, and sadness. In the second round of analysis, I recoded the data and collapsed codes according to thematic consistencies, i.e., drawing connections among the initial codes to organize them into axial categories with corresponding subthemes ([Saldaña, 2016](#)) to elucidate larger thematic trends in the data. These subthemes and axial categories are shown in the subheadings below.

5. Results

Analysis of the writing samples collected for this study revealed two central themes to characterize teachers' visions of critical emotional praxis. As noted above, research on teacher emotions does often refer to them categorically as "positive" or "negative" ([Chen, 2020](#)). However, within a critical emotional praxis framework, analysis of teacher emotions can provide insights into the mechanisms of power and privilege in schools and society. This orientation also allows for a more nuanced exploration of emotion in teaching. To capture some of this complexity, I use the categories of "encouraging" and "challenging" below as the axes from which subthemes of resolve, bravery, limiting beliefs, and risk avoidance radiate. All participant names mentioned throughout the article are pseudonyms.

5.1. *Encouraging Emotions Leading to Resolve and Bravery*

This study was first designed to understand the emotional experiences of teachers and what those emotions reveal about teaching in today's sociopolitical context. To address these questions, I first share the encouraging emotions and experiences—times when teachers cited resolve and bravery. To establish a context for bravery and resolve, I provide the participant quote below:

I see so many threats. Some of the current ones are loss of teachers, power of politicians in curriculum and laws, and lack of resources. I think I feel overwhelmed because I have no idea how to combat that. I feel like I'm closing the door on a sinking ship and hoping water doesn't get into my room. That's how I approach it. Probably not the right mentality, but a mentality that keeps me sane and helps me focus on what I can do in my classroom.

5.1.1. Resolve

The teachers who participated in this study expressed resolve in their desire to support and affirm their students. They most often positioned themselves as advocates for students, their colleagues, the profession, and/or the transformative potential of their content.

For example, Beckie was a library media specialist. Beckie expressed resolve to support and “protect students’ freedom” in her library.

I hear of librarians being fired all over our country due to books they selected for their library collections. It is not a question of if anymore, it is a question of when there will be a challenge where your professional reputation is put to the forefront. I am not willing to risk failing my professional obligations to my students to appease the voices of a few. . . . It is my job to protect my students’ freedom to read and access to information.

Teacher resolution could also be cited in discussions of common shortfalls of schools or teachers. Several participants discussed the ways in which their schools could do better to support diverse learners and their families. Others shared how administrators could engage in “diversity doublespeak”—issuing statements in support of equity and diversity while neglecting to dismantle structural or institutional barriers to those same values. As one example, participant Aimee, who taught middle school ELA, felt resolved to validate and sustain her students’ ethnic heritages.

I thought about how some of my students will shorten their names to make it easier for some white teachers to pronounce. For example, [one of my students] went by [a shortened version of his name] just for the ease of his teachers. Some students already erase bits of who they are to fit in because they think that is what's required to be valued. I absolutely refuse to be that kind of teacher.

Aimee concluded that she “absolutely refuse[d]” to allow her students to feel that way in her classroom. While a simple example, this is evidence of one teacher’s effort to recommit to centering student identity.

5.1.2. Bravery

Bravery was akin to resolve, as it carried momentum for the future, but it also meant acting in the face of risk. Beckie, the school librarian, enacted bravery in her library resource acquisitions. She began replacing several texts on indigenous peoples that were “horrifying[ly]” outdated and added a series of books affirming other topics of identity. She knew the latter could invite pushback, but she had collected research that supported identity-sustaining reading materials to defend her professional choices.

Similarly, Nick, a middle school social studies teacher, shared a story in which he played a popular rap song in class to introduce an inquiry about recent news reports of police violence.

I am not ever afraid of being reprimanded, and I wish we, as educators, wouldn't have to feel that way so often. As long as you are not telling your students what to think, who to vote for, what religion to practice, what holidays to celebrate, who to love, etc., then I think you are doing exactly what is in your purview. I did point out comments that could be construed as insensitive. But everything can always be turned into a learning moment.

Nick expressed bravery, even though certain topics or materials could invite pushback. This was sustained by a supportive administrator and a conviction that it was simply the right thing to do to seize upon "learning moments" taking place in the community and in students' lives.

5.2. *Challenging Emotions Leading to Limiting Beliefs and Risk Avoidance*

Other, more "challenging" emotions such as shame, fear, guilt, and discomfort also arose. Where these emotions were shared, participants shied away from justice-oriented teaching, saying they felt the context or circumstances did not support them enough. They discussed challenging emotions most frequently when certain professional risks were at hand or when they felt their personal identity or experiences did not support a rich enough understanding of the perspectives of others.

In my first couple of years would have told [students] to skip "fiery" topics completely. The teacher I'm working to become now helped them have the hard conversations instead of skipping over them completely. But, there are still challenges.

Here, risks outweighed the benefits for teachers across the career spectrum.

5.2.1. Limiting Beliefs

Aimee, a middle grades ELA teacher who identified as a white woman, expressed discomfort with discussing topics of race and ethnicity due to her culture of origin:

[Growing up], I had almost zero experience being minoritized. So, because of that, my discomfort in difficult conversations is there. . . . Certainly, if I shut up and listen more, I will give more voice to my students and maybe fill in some of my own gaps in understanding.

As a cohort of entirely white teachers, many expressed a sense of personal limitation when considering how to sustain racial identities. However, there was more to limiting beliefs than teacher race. For example, Nick, a middle grades social studies teacher who identified as a white man who grew up in an upper-middle class household, also expressed discomfort. Nick wrote that he was sometimes "at a loss" to understand the positions of students who have experienced marginalization due to their family's socioeconomic status. He was disappointed in his lack of experience and understanding.

I am at a loss some days when teaching at my school because I have never known what it feels like to be living below the poverty line, and I probably never will. It is an eerie thought but a very realistic one.

Despite feeling bravery in other areas of justice-oriented teaching, here Nick's lack of life experience felt like a deficit and left him feeling some limitations in his perspective.

Personal missteps, past experiences, and fear of misunderstanding also inspired shame, discomfort, fear, and regret. One early elementary teacher, Timothy, discussed his

personal experience with misgendering a person in his community and how his personal background informed his perspective on this issue.

I really needed the reminder from this week's readings that "we must learn to use our failures as an opportunity to do better." I feel absolutely ashamed when I unintentionally mis-gender someone in my community but I have to remember that the work of an identity-conscious person is not always easy, is never over, and is filled with missteps.

Learning from a sense of shame in his limitations in that moment, Timothy went on to express that even the youngest of elementary school children deserve the opportunity to appreciate the complexity of identities in whatever developmentally appropriate or accessible way they can.

5.2.2. Risk Avoidance

All participants in this study cited risks as one inevitable element of identity-conscious teaching. Risks could be professional or personal, large or small. Some teachers were simply concerned about risks to a safe and inclusive classroom culture; others were concerned about retribution from stakeholders. Participants explained that they were fearful of risks related to job security, misunderstandings, and student discomfort. In these instances, teachers were not able to find a way to enact identity-conscious teaching, or they envisioned the risks to be too high.

As one example, Aimee expressed discomfort and implied a sense of fear or regret in her choices to avoid identity topics in her middle level English curriculum.

I honestly stick to very benign topics for examples in my classroom. Articles about bees, caffeine, school cell phone usage, and stories where the crime is a necklace being stolen by a cat are my go-tos. Am I alone in this? Are there ways to go about this that I am not thinking of?

As Aimee's quotation above suggests, sometimes omissions were as poignant as inclusions. Like other classmates, Aimee's personal history and experiences informed how she set up boundaries in her curricular choices. However, she was aware that there were limits to what she was comfortable doing.

Michael, a high school science teacher, worried about the impact of politicization or controversialization of certain science topics.

As a science teacher, I try to keep politics out of my classroom as I believe that the spread of scientific misinformation is a prevalent issue in this country. I have also seen discussions of certain topics alienate others and create controversy within the classroom. I think that my biggest worry for allowing students to discuss controversial topics is that they will tear down the safe space that I have tried so hard to create for my students.

It was most important to Michael that students feel "safe" in his classroom, and controversies risked damaging that safety. In short, Michael and the other participants in this study felt a tension between creating a welcoming and affirming space while enabling conversations about "controversial" or "politicized topics" in their classrooms.

6. Discussion

Teachers in my study cited a rich set of personal, professional, societal, and individual factors as influences for their emotions and perceptions. They also wrote on their visions (Hammerness, 2001, 2003) of themselves and enactments of justice-oriented teaching and ways they had engaged elements of critical emotional praxis (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008;

[Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2009](#)) to advocate for and sustain aspects of student identities that have been politicized or controversialized by politicians and others in the public. This study provides specific examples of how potential resistance, potential pushback, and even perceived risks to professional security may inform teaching practices. The teacher writing samples provided here show that teachers' jobs are more complex than they have ever been.

6.1. Limitations

There are limitations to the data set used in this study. First and foremost, the data collected for this study were collected during a graduate course context by the instructor of the course. Although participant names were not known until after grades were submitted for the semester, and prompts were open-ended, the writing samples that composed the data for this study were compelled/required coursework. Therefore, participant responses may be influenced by the power dynamics present in course contexts. To this point, data collection procedures did not allow for the researcher to know exactly when writing samples were completed (i.e., before or after student-participants accessed course content). Therefore, it is possible that some statements were influenced by course readings or consideration of their instructors' perception, etc. Regardless, the excerpts featured here provide meaningful insights into teachers' emotional experiences.

Further, all the participants in this study identified as white. While other aspects of diversity and identity (e.g., sexuality, gender, socioeconomic status) were represented in the participant pool, race played an important role in setting the context for their personal experiences and lived understandings. However, the findings from this study are relevant in the richness they provide to pictures of teacher emotions in today's contentious sociopolitical environment.

6.2. Implications for Teacher Emotional Wellbeing and Retention

This study provides a more intimate view of extant research on teacher wellbeing and retention in politically divided times. For example, research conducted during 2021–2022 found that a representative sample of U.S. teachers and school leaders experienced increased stress over political issues; many even experienced harassment, which impacted their wellbeing. This was despite over half of educators reporting that they did not want limitations on their ability to discuss social issues such as racial inequity in lessons ([Woo et al., 2022](#)). Taken alongside the findings from my study of teacher writing samples, one finds concerning tensions for educators who seek to support all students while addressing layered inequities.

This has implications across all phases of career experience. Several veteran teachers in my study seemed the most frustrated, worried, or concerned when it came to risks of unemployment. The RAND report cited above also found teachers citing politicization as a reason they may leave their jobs ([Woo et al., 2022](#)). One may consider how the field is at risk of losing highly experienced, passionate teachers who are individually equipped to do the work but may be facing structural barriers.

My analysis of teacher writing samples also found their enactments and visions of identity-conscious teaching were socially implicated and intertwined with multidimensional emotions. These findings relate to additional extant research. In alignment with the theory of critical emotional *praxis* ([Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008](#); [Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2009](#)), the emotions experienced by the teachers in this study inspired action or inaction, advocacy or aversion. Teachers needed to feel a certain degree of safety to form realistic resolutions or to act bravely in the face of risk. This means that administrators, like minded colleagues, or even personal circumstances may support encouraging emotions and, therefore, more responsive instruction. Likewise, the absence of these could lead to

challenging emotions. This underscores the importance of critical communities of practice, support from school leaders and teacher educators, and community advocates for teachers. Teachers are likely to experience very strong and very justifiable fears, worries, and other challenging emotions when they consider identity-conscious teaching. A structural and individual well of resources is necessary to sustain them.

6.3. Implications for Teacher Development and Support

This study enters into conversation with other scholarship exploring the field's efforts to educate and support culturally competent teachers. The teacher workforce continues to be "mismatched" to the cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity of U.S. public school students (Darling-Hammond, 2005), raising career-long issues for teacher educators seeking to support the cultural competence of their students (Ukpokodu, 2011).

Extant scholarship has indicated that teachers benefit from ongoing professional learning that includes self-reflection on assumptions, beliefs, and experiences related to culture (Li, 2013; Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2019). However, teachers still indicate a lack of self-efficacy in culturally responsive teaching (Siliunas et al., 2024). Further, increasing divisiveness and other sociopolitical factors influence teachers' decisions and confidence in culturally responsive, justice-oriented teaching. However, as other research has noted, teachers increasingly engage in social justice pedagogies with emotions of fear and a lack of support cited (Raymond et al., 2024).

To varying degrees, participants visioned ways to actively dismantle inequity, marginalization, and discrimination in their spheres of influence. However, these visions were accompanied by concerns about potential risks and the realities of teaching in today's highly polarized—even contentious—sociocultural context. As Hammerness (2006) noted, analyses of teacher visions help bring understanding to disparities or distances between what teachers imagine and what they enact in the classroom. Here, visions were not always aspirational. Rather, teacher visions included fears and worries about misunderstandings that could be invited. Teachers therefore envisioned ways they could see themselves falling short of the promises of justice-oriented teaching just as often (or more) than they could see themselves fulfilling its promises.

Therefore, teacher education practitioners and scholars should take heed—teachers are working in increasingly complex contexts, requiring increasingly robust supports for emotional wellbeing, communities of practice, and ongoing professional learning. Further research on teacher emotions and perceptions will aid in these efforts.

7. Conclusions

More research needs to be done to understand how specific community contexts relate to teachers' enactments of justice-oriented teaching. Where are the successes? Where/how do teachers feel supported and why? How can coalition building be a realistic goal? How can tenets of justice-oriented teaching be leveraged within local, regional, and school policies so teachers have an imperative to engage? Is the political context really what the media makes of it?

Contextualizing teachers' emotions as part and parcel to justice-oriented teaching in diverse sociopolitical environments will help teacher education researchers and practitioners be better partners and advocates for our classroom teaching colleagues. In teacher education, we strive to contribute to teachers' critical capacities and transformative pedagogies. While teacher content knowledge and pedagogical expertise is a necessary first step, sociopolitical realities may necessitate a more intensive infrastructure of support. Teachers need on-the-ground assistance from administrators, colleagues, and university partners

so they may learn how to gain trust, find common ground, and effectively partner with individuals who may misunderstand justice-oriented teaching.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Original data used for this study is not published due to privacy or ethics restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Self-identified participant details.

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Grade and Content Taught
Claire	F	W	ML 5th grade ELA
Timothy	M	W	Elem, 2nd grade
Michael	M	W	HS Science
Daniel	M	W	ML family/consumer sci.
Becky	F	W	ML library media specialist
Juliana	F	W	Elem, 3rd grade
Aimee	F	W	ML ELA
Nick	M	W	ML SS
Cora	F	W	ML/HS agriculture
Lisa	F	W	ML ELA

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