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The *Journal of Thought* is a biannual publication devoted to the reflective examination of educational issues and problems from the perspective of different disciplines and interdisciplinary lenses. The *Journal* welcomes scholar's work that represent varied viewpoints, methodologies, disciplines, cultures, and nationalities as it seeks to treat the most comprehensive issues and problems confronting education throughout the world. Essays that develop a reasoned and supported argument, that offer insightful analysis and critiques of other's arguments, or that report on significant research of interest to the field are welcomed. The editorial goal is to stimulate a warranted synthesis of diverse viewpoints and to encourage interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary dialogue. The *Journal* is published by Caddo Gap Press, San Francisco, California, and sponsored by the Society of Philosophy and History of Education. Editorial correspondence and inquiries should be addressed to LuAnne Kuelzer, Editor, *Journal of Thought*, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma City, kuelzer@okstate.edu.

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In Memorium Stan Ivie, 1936-2022

Texas Women's University, Emeritus

In 2007 Stan Ivie retired as Chairman of the Department of Education at Texas Women's University. He moved to Utah with his wife Jeri and built a ranch. Stan kept up his scholarly activities which by then included over 100 articles and books, including his 2003 book, *On the Wings of Metaphor*. He wrote a novel, *In the Shadow of the Trojan Horse*, and was working on a thriller, *The Devil's Tramping Ground*. His articles appeared in the *Peabody Journal of Education*, *Journal of Thought*, *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *Comparative Education*, *The Educational Forum*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Journal of the Philosophy and History of Education*, *Proceedings of the Southwestern Philosophy of Education Society*, *Vitae Scholasticae*, *Texas Tech Journal of Education*, *The Psychological Record*, *College Student Journal*, *Contemporary Education*, *Education*, and *McGill Journal of Education*.

Stan maintained a lifelong commitment to the study, analysis, and criticism of public education. He was consistently interested in the literary devices we use in teaching and the role of the affective domain, aesthetics, and axiology. His last essays, "Metaphor: Key to Critical and Creative Thinking" and "Storytelling and Bigotry" that he intended to present at the annual meeting of the Society of Philosophy and History of Education demonstrate that he was still involved in thinking about conditions in which we live and work.

—David Snelgrove
Society of Philosophy and History of Education

Whiteness Boundaries

Laboring for Meaning in Teacher Education Programs

**Kerry Alexander
Claire Collins**
University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

This theoretical essay considers how we, two teacher educators, work toward justice in our university teacher education program. By examining the contradictions between our conceptions of teaching for justice and the application of shifting practice in relation to Whiteness, we locate and interrogate generative spaces for redesign in our literacy courses and mentoring. We use deconstruction as a theoretical frame to break down how Whiteness is embedded in the education system through discourse patterns, policy initiatives, course programming, and the social construction of the white body. We utilize boundary theory to help locate where justice might best be practiced in relation to our identified locations of Whiteness. In addition, we theorize that critical agency design (as an armature of boundary theory), when used along-

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side deconstruction, can pinpoint specific areas worth transforming *in praxis*. We identify how tools have been used in boundary crossing and then apply these notions specific to contemporary teacher education. We propose three modes of labor at this juncture: (1) laboring for meaning around compliance and care, (2) laboring for meaning around the languaging of equity and justice, and (3) laboring for meaning around the tools we use to mediate shared dialogue. We identify the implications of these epistemological, practice-based shifts in our work today as we continue to think through future iterations of teacher education programming. We come up for air with more questions than answers, yet the expansiveness is welcomed.

Introduction

University-based teacher education occurs within a system whose economic, social, and cultural foundation is white¹ settler colonialism (Gonzalez, 1999; Oakes et al., 2013). As such, Eurocentric ideologies pervade notions of professional knowledge and practice, including teacher evaluation and certification. From early common schools (Rice, 1893), the notion of educating children came from a colonial narrative of citizenship, morality, and, especially for students of indigenous, immigrant, refugee, and migrant students and families, documented efforts toward assimilation and subjugation (Mills, 1997). In doing so, written agreements (later, standards) of what was most valuable to teach and learn became a hegemonic backbone to formal schooling. For the interests of this conceptual essay, the same Western epistemology that grounds U.S. public schooling discourse also frames the schooling evaluations, coursework, and field experiences of (primarily white, female) educators who comprise 80% of the teachers in our nation's classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The systems, however, no matter how populated with initiatives toward social justice and equity, are not actively shifting students' lived experiences in classrooms and schooling communities (Adair & Colegrove, 2021; Love, 2019; Tatum, 2015). We can do better.

In the following essay, we share how we are laboring toward justice in our university teacher education program by pinpointing the contradictions between the *conceptions* of teaching for justice and the application of shifting practice toward justice *in praxis*. These pinpoints, in conjunction with our growing understanding of Whiteness in literacy spaces, are what we call the *Whiteness boundaries* that shape notions of learning to teach. They include (but are not confined to) conceptions and connotations of expertise, structures and formats of growth, and prioritizing the written word over other modes of expression in general education coursework and field experiences for student teachers. Rath-

er than reducing the focus of engaged practice through reductionism and representational rhetoric, we endeavor to shift the lens and broaden the focus to locate generative spaces for redesign.

This charge toward justice must consider historical teaching discourses alongside local and present contexts. Contemporary inequities in schooling experiences based on racial and economic division have been made explicitly clear. Indeed, Adair and Colegrove (2021) argue that schooling has been *designed* for experiential segregation. If it is in the schools, this same design is in the programs preparing the teachers *for* schools. Indeed, we have witnessed many white people struggle to recognize how historical, systemic Whiteness in schooling manifests, even when steeped in teacher education programs that claim to champion social justice initiatives and antiracist agendas. We include ourselves in this struggle.

In the following, we endeavor to define Whiteness in education writ large and then sketch out local iterations of what we call *Whiteness boundaries* in learning to teach in one southwestern state. We take up this inquiry from our position as literacy instructors and researchers at a large public university by naming how we see Whiteness manifest in discourse patterning, educational policy, and the body in our work with preservice teachers. From there, we delineate what we call boundary-crossing *labors*, which we take up alongside critical design theory in our courses and mentorship to nuance and trouble these boundaries. We must also bear in mind our use of the term boundary or boundaries as sites of *multiple* intersecting tensions, which we do not presume or expect to quantify or objectively delineate. We will end with considerations and implications for course pedagogy.

Whiteness in Education

Whiteness and education, specifically U.S. schooling, follow closely nested patterning. White supremacy culture characteristics, such as paternalism, either/or thinking, worship of the written word, and one-right-way (Jones & Okun, 2001), undergird acceptability politics in normative schooling discourses. This is true, especially between and among educational stakeholders and policymakers. For instance, one can look at the integration of state-wide testing over the last few decades, which harnesses the same triumvirate of money, intelligence surveillance, and sorting as it did in the past (Lomawaima, 1993), albeit more surreptitiously. Educational equity is something teacher educators aspire toward, but disentangling the work from the words and routines of policy takes great critical precision. Consider how the

distance that Whiteness reifies through Euro-centric standards (Apple, 2013; Au, 2012; De Lissovoy, 2016), intellectualizing over listening (Kleinrock, 2021), and fears of not “doing” anti-racism right or causing harm (Gorski, 2019), continue to thwart actual changes that affect the living experiences for children in classrooms. Knowing the historical roots of U.S. public education—the histories and ideologies behind the shaping of bodies and minds—is imperative for all teachers.

Nevertheless, knowing how these roots continue to manifest is a crucial and critical practice. For those who are just starting this journey, recognizing *how* Whiteness has manifested into materiality over time is critical to recognizing it in action (Leonardo, 2009). Today’s policy and mandated curricular programming is designed and aligned through institutions born from the same systemic underpinnings, which reify and reproduce, quite effectively, the character model of appropriate teacher participation (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). This roil, this wave of continued making is ours to dam.

Whiteness in Teacher Preparation Programs

Consider how white “ways of being” saturate the character model of many new-teacher imaginaries. For example, *who* chooses to become a teacher and *how* they imagine the embodied work (as they develop their professional identity) speaks volumes about the ideological, often unyielding, white discourse of schooling when learning to teach (Hyttén & Adkins, 2001; King, 1991; Marx, 2006; Sleeter, 2001, 2016). These new teacher imaginaries (fed by media, consumer rhetoric, and social construction) reproduce “the dominant, (dis)embodied and normalized culture of Whiteness that pervades contemporary teacher education” (Brown, 2014, p. 327; Giroux, 1997). These and other forms of social conditioning around, for instance, linguistic and literary appropriateness (Flores & Rosa, 2015), literary imagination (Morrison, 1992), academic curriculum (Au, 2012), and certification expectations (Zeichner, 2020) are tremendous tides that design (and verily recruit) the standard teacher-model in the broader U.S. imaginary. Moreover, in our state, despite the impetus toward change and revised recruitment strategy, new teachers in urban districts are likely to end their career in three to five years (Texas Education Agency, 2022). Coaching teachers to stay, to endure, in harmful systems is not the answer. Nor is turning our scrutiny from the practices that uphold the hegemony.

To divest from white cultural characteristics as an armature of educational discourse can feel, for many educators, like an attack on their professional identity—one that is also profoundly nested in the foun-

dational mechanics of the system. It can also feel counter to a lifetime investment toward conscientious practice and intellectual success. Conceptions of mastery and “truth” are inevitably called into question; herein lies a boundary of Whiteness. Haviland (2008) and other scholars address this by naming race-evasive strategies that teachers use to insulate themselves from responsibility and “gloss over” issues of race and racism “in ways that reinforce the status quo, even when they have a stated desire to do the opposite” (p. 41; Hytten & Adkins, 2001; King, 1991; Land, 2019; Marx, 2006; Sleeter, 2001, 2016; Wetzel et al., 2017; Wetzel et al., 2021). These hedging patterns show up in preparing new teachers because school systems operate in Whiteness-dominant, normed ways and are kept in place by people who subscribe to those norms (Ward, 2019). Therefore, in order to shift patterns of Whiteness from our dialogic praxis in teacher preparation programs, we must first identify the edges of the “official” white container within which we are steeped, and once we have the edges, we may strategically and intentionally cross them.

Whiteness and the White Body

Most, but not all, of our educational communities have been with other white educators. As white female identifying, our collective holds many spirits in our hands. Furthermore, it is no secret that the white woman’s role within the educational labor machine (her professional identity and how it manifests) is borne from a historical trope that both feeds *and is fed by* the mainstream imagination: popular media, memory, and literary craft (Morrison, 1992), among others. This teacher image is a prime example of “the ‘subject-function’ (p. 53), which produces a ‘subjectivity-effect’ (p. 48)” (Althusser, 2003, as quoted by Leonardo, 2004, pg. 41) that saturates the word *teacher* (as it did for the authors) with racialized subjectivity. In turn, this subjectivity shapes the actions and imaginations of a teacher candidate herself. Per Dunham and Alexander (2022), we urge readers to ponder: “it is not the white woman under scrutiny, but the system and practices that this intersectional identity has come to dominate that demands interrogation” (p. 16).

When we endeavor toward transformative practices and (re)construction of the white *body* as implicated in the perpetuation of Whiteness (Giroux, 1997), we must recognize our partiality within our intersecting identities. This is the development of racial literacy. We must also foster the requisite humility to locate instances of contradiction and tension within ourselves and the systems in which we participate. Yoon (2012) names these instances “Whiteness-at-work.” She writes:

“Recognizing Whiteness-at-work can become a tool for educators to interrupt taken-for-granted ideologies and actions and redirect discourse toward socially just aims to support educational opportunities for their students” (p. 609). For white people in particular, this labor must be done upon our own dime, time, and mind without the continued laboring and belaboring of our colleagues of color (Aguilar, 2020; Picower & Kohli, 2017; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). This labor is our charge.

As white coaches and teacher educators, we recognize ourselves as sedimented beings with experiences and values made by and upon us, dipped and continuously (re)designed within discourses of participation, educational or otherwise. Our socio-cultural conditioning, our spectrum of identities, and our apprenticeship to observation (Lortie, 1975; Smagorinsky, 2020) sediment our classroom practices, bodies, and power to affect change in response to various problems of practice. Self-awareness of how Whiteness works in and through us is primary, as is the notion that language and identity continuously evolve, are fluid and complex, and are mediated through dialogic and intentional negotiations. These layers both guide and shape our desire toward responsive pedagogical design.

As literacy teacher educators, we also recognize the systemic white gaze embedded in the literature, media, programming, and resources available to teachers (Martin, 2021; Morrison, 1992). We also are aware of the “white listening subject” stance many educators embody as an observer or listeners when evaluating learners towards linguistic “appropriateness” in standards and teaching practice (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Sensory interpretations of success and accuracy, borne through racialized nervous systems, cannot be conflated with objectivity. In this manner, we follow critical literacy theorists (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2009, 2012; Luke, 2012) who teach us to “read the world” as a text, to disrupt and examine the commonplace, and per Sealy-Ruiz (2018), dig deeper into our racial consciousness if we are to fully embrace and teach to the collective capacity of the learners in our care. These intra-actions of bodies’ knowing, being, and doing (Barad, 2007) reside in what we might call the “official world” of teaching within the academy. Acknowledgment of such in ourselves is a means to get curious and to model for others the “grammars of settlement and structuration of conventional reason” (López López, & Nikey, 2020, p. 7) embedded in normative teaching practice.

Deconstruction

“Justice,” Derrida (1967) noted, “is what gives deconstruction its movement, that is, constantly to suspect, to criticize the given determinations of culture, of institutions...to respect this relation to the other is justice” (as quoted in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 26). For many (white) people, this process evokes tremendous emotions, yet we cannot allow this to stop the discourse of race in teacher education (Matias, 2016). In taking up this frame for our work with teachers, we endeavor to begin identifying the traces, per Derrida, that are the “condition(s) of thought and experience” (Derrida, 1967, as quoted in Jackson & Mazzei, 2021, p. 21) that linger in our language and action whether acknowledged or afforded scrutiny. Identifying and interrogating these traces are what makes our stance critical.

Deconstruction as Related to Whiteness

Per Derrida, traces happen inside us during the subtle presentations of *familiarities* in praxis (the commonplace), arriving in shifts or waves of varying sizes, often unfettered by contraption or capture in the rush of time and decision-making. We use the word *familiarity* to focus on feelings or concerns that erupt in practice and otherwise might go unnoticed. For instance, the traditional preparation of teachers in university education programs can be considered a cultural (white) way of doing things, of “knowing” things. These “things” intra-act in interpretations, valuations, and assumptions of what constitutes effective teaching. For example, instead of relying on objective, Western measures of data identification, often rooted in transactional, property-based binaries of *right* or *wrong*, or instantiations of intellectual ownership, we can challenge our teachers (and ourselves) to invoke *felt* tensions and contradictions in decision making. These *traces* might recognize where personal-value, rule-based, and labor systems collide, and many times *traces* appear to be paradoxes and seem irreconcilable. This nervous-system data speaks directly to the injustices embedded in the roil of schooling discourse.

Additionally, deconstruction, per Jackson and Mazzei (2012), asks us to “ride the tension” or “glimpse the snag” in order to destabilize what appears routine and identify the words, worlds, moments, and incongruities that percolate with dis-ease. Metaphorically, this is the gray space between binaries or dualities, the both/and, and the ambiguous and cringy and discomforting—not only our own but its perpetuation in our thinking with others as well. To think inside this space, we argue, is to interrogate between borders or boundaries of dominant

discourses. Additionally, the hybridity of tensions (or the collision of identities and teaching discourses) are evoked through carefully negotiated discussions and an appreciative stance toward learning (Wetzel et al., 2023).

Critical Agency Design

To conceive of teaching and coaching from the point of deconstruction, we first must name areas of tension and contradiction in our systems and then employ *critical agency design* to reshape practices. “Tensions and contradictions” are the language of activity theory (Engeström, 1999; 2000). As teacher educators, we take up this theory *alongside* deconstruction to pinpoint specific areas in our systems and systems of practice worth transforming. These areas include, we argue, all fundamental patterns of Whiteness that constitute the “realness” of schooling systems. Critical agency design is one vehicle to get us moving in this direction. Per Ellis, et al. (2015):

This critical consciousness [per critical agency design], it is claimed, is stimulated by the power of the conceptual tools of activity theory (as represented by the triangular image of the activity system) in helping participants analyse how the object of their collective activity is constructed, how rules and a division of labour have emerged historically within a community of practitioners, and how cultural tools are appropriated by members of that community—and how these might be changed for the better. (p. 47)

In our theorizing with critical agency design, we suggest shifting attention to boundary crossing as one strategy communities can utilize when viewing classroom data, especially data that speaks to the *enactment* of ideology (Wetzel et al., 2016). By classroom data, we include observational notes on teaching, video and audio, conversation transcripts, classroom discussions, lesson plans, and so on. Such dialogue around data includes remembering, problematizing, and laboring through language to conceptualize equity across diverse forms of expertise.

Boundary Crossing

Boundaries, per Akkerman and Bakker (2011) are defined as “socio-cultural differences leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (p. 1). In our U.S. public schooling system, boundaries between and among identities, affiliations, interpretations, and expectations in learning to teach are saturated with potential interdisciplinary, intercultural possibilities. Moreover, as mentioned in previous sections, we replace the notion of interaction with *intra-action* to represent the

multiplicity of tension and turn toward posthumanist performativity (as an armature of deconstruction) in efforts to stretch the landscape of possible pedagogical design (Barad, 2003). However, the extant literature on boundary crossing has yet to focus specifically on Whiteness patterning as a salient boundary in preservice teacher development. Instead, boundary-crossing objects in teacher education have centered on mediating devices between competing (yet similar) domains, such as a university teacher education program and the partnering school(s) or a coaching journal shared between a preservice and mentor teacher (Gurley et al., 2015). Boundary-crossing is also closely tied to Lave and Wenger's (1991) theories of situated learning and communities of practice as spaces of generative, horizontal conflict and potential sites of expansive growth.

Because we seek a *transformation* of practice (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Engeström, 1999; 2000), we suggest the boundary-crossing nature of a living document, such as a vision statement or a shared rubric, designed and redesigned in-community, can chip away at these static measures (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007; Zeichner et al., 2014) and open generative space to target Whiteness and unidentified racism in "official" schooling discourse(s). As an object crossing among and through competing frames of schooling, teacher education, and personal identity, a living, shared vision *as an object itself* is designed to (de)form and (re)form upon a continuum from complement to critical change agent, all *in use* toward critical transformation (Baral, 2006). Furthermore, because the edges of Whiteness-at-work manifest inside formal documents, policies, and conceptions of mastery, the boundary-crossing nature of a living document can (with attention) counter these uniform measures. It removes the container that shapes the interpretation of observational data, data sources, and professional expectations of dress, voice, tone, and time priorities.

Boundary Crossing in Teacher Education

In university teacher education programs specifically, boundary-crossing occurs at fissures between institutions, ideologies, levels of experience, and the accompanying expectations determined by those who hold power. Each individual within the structure/system of the university teacher education program brings their own unique identity, memories, discomforts, and affect. These can become entry points of analysis to confront and question what, to many educators, may appear "natural" regarding schooling instruction.

To identify dominant boundaries in our mentoring, we may pay

close attention to the semiotic systems of positioning (e.g., gesture, analogy, evasion, collision) and the felt resonances of individuals as they reflect on a teaching event. We can partner these reflections with a shared vision of equitable, justice-focused teaching, side-by-side, as we discuss observational data. By focusing reflective dialogue as *intra-action* among the individuals, the event, and the vision, we can foster an epistemological broadening, seeking multiplicity and pluralism in a system that champions singularity or rigidity. We can also work to amplify awareness of boundary crossing during this reflection time by subtracting the expected and juxtaposing it with an array of other possibilities, or alternative theory, to evoke a laboring for meaning. Below, we present three “labors” that we find most salient in our coaching, mentoring, and instructional practices.

Laboring for Meaning Around Compliance and Care

As mentioned in the introduction, and again in our consideration of Whiteness in educational settings, we know bodies carry historical, socio-cultural markers that, in the uptake of school discourses, are evaluated on normed physical comportments and Euro-traditional ways of being. As children, teachers, and now, as teacher educators, we have seen the interminable amount of time learners have been expected to sit in tiny chairs and pay attention (with the requested head nods, posture, and output). We have seen how those hours were spent (or, on what they were not spent) and the off-hand, rather casual insistence that *with time*, the children would come to realize their successes depend only on their gumption to *work harder*. This assumption denies a critical look at the systems shaping the container, the body, and the interpretive gaze within which the child participates.

In our ongoing dialogue with preservice teachers in coursework and fieldwork, we notice and invite purposeful struggle in decentering systemic Whiteness across multiple frames: historical, local, and individual, and how these concepts shape the living experiences for the bodies they teach in classrooms. In our post-observation conferencing, we have witnessed preservice teachers use phrases such as “talking about these things with my students,” choosing the word “things” rather than explicitly using the words race or racism, or “feeling weird” in a classroom where one’s social and emotional well-being parallels physical compliance. The patterns of what is *seen* may not yet be something they have “official” teacher language to describe; as teacher-educators, we zoom in here. In other discussions, preservice teachers shape stories around human behavior that do not align with their developing under-

standing of inclusive and anti-oppressive spaces and pedagogies. They see children excluded from literary discussions to finish “seatwork” and they hear adults’ linguistic marking (or “fixing” oral grammar) during informal conversations with children on the playground. Compliance, as it intersects with care, is a tricky concept in schooling, which shows us the importance of developing shared discourse patterns for preservice teachers when they experience moments of inequitable ambiguity. These fuzzy, felt collisions between theory and practice are rich points for further interrogation.

These moments of inequitable ambiguity are not easy to shape into a discussion. However, we see it as an opportunity to create an ongoing communication channel around how injustice and inequity look and sound—what actual events, moves, and language perpetuate the harm. We cannot know how to foster justice if we do not recognize iterations of *injustice*; we cannot foster equity if we cannot recognize *inequity*.

Laboring for Meaning Around the Language of Equity and Justice

In addition to holding space for preservice teachers to complicate complicity and care in their teaching, we have also found opportunities for dialogue around the language of equity in our university’s shared vision for teaching. Language on this living document includes, for example, explicitly valuing multiple knowledges, designing inclusive and anti-oppressive spaces, and taking challenges and risks toward educational justice. For preservice teachers and their mentors and instructors to seek the actions behind the words (representations) of equity—to begin collecting how such language becomes life, embodied in practice—data must exist, be engaged, and be troubled (Pollock, 2004). This work is not simple or fast, but it is imperative to shifting cultural consciousness toward enacting equity in classroom spaces. Listing, noting, curating, and cataloging the (non-exhaustive) lines between the language of equity and the pedagogical doings in the classroom that embody these notions must become our dialogic and shared labor.

Additionally, superficial measures of professional discernment that deny abstraction and subjectivity and divorce participatory agents from their lived realities must be continuously sought out and dismissed. The *materiality* of language-in-action (or languaging) in real-time, matters to our ability to transform practice. We take up the call that educators who are intent on enacting substantial change in their programming and endeavor to move explicitly from “who they are” into “who they want to be” (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019, p. 21; Sail-

ors & Manning, 2020). To do so, we must continuously interrogate the verbiage of equity embedded in all tools and documents and prioritize the development of a (local) conceptual application.

Laboring for Meaning Through the Development of Tools

If we want to shift discriminatory behaviors and beliefs in praxis, we need tools—linguistic, conceptual, material—that prioritize alternative ways of knowing. “Thinking is mediated by cultural tools,” Smagorinsky (2020) reminds us, “...whose potential for practice is a function of the setting and the cultural and historical antecedents that have shaped the present moment” (p. 13-14). Of course, this demands that teacher educators have a broad understanding of the culture of Whiteness if they are to wield their tools wisely, beyond the superficial.

For instance, a critical lens on the conceptual tools we already use, such as dialogic inquiry, can help groups (re)design conceptions of “quality teaching” (Beneke & Love, 2020) to prioritize and conceptualize educational equity instead of educational uniformity. Furthermore, tools, such as teacher evaluations, must be scrutinized for epistemic equity and, with an effortful redesign, help participants mediate new thinking patterns in and with their local communities. For example, Wetzel et al. (in press) hone a direct focus on equity through shared inquiry, community connection, and dialogic praxis for teacher and student agency and activism (Bieler, 2010; Sailors & Manning, 2019). Similarly, Aguilar’s (2020) equity framework for coaching centers inter-relational tools, such as a teacher and mentor looking at classroom data together and strategic planning to support the emotional labor of justice work. Like Price-Dennis and Sealy-Ruiz (2021), she foregrounds racial consciousness and dialogic collaboration in efforts to divest from oppressive systems and practices.

Other coaching tools work to evoke counter-stories and decenter epistemic dominance in mentoring conversations. Wetzel et al. (2022) present a tool called “critical race wonderings” to “go beyond surface-level” identification of c/Critical issues in teaching and connect to “concrete examples of teaching practice” (Land, 2018, p. 505). Bieler’s (2010) research foregrounds the value (and challenges) of “dialogic praxis” in mentoring through the “continual acts of negotiation” (p. 396) teaching and learning demand. By targeting a “moment of rupture” (p. 398) between a preservice teacher and a mentor teacher, Bieler explores how power and positionality shape mentoring talk. Dialogic praxis, she argues, centers on the generative nature of embracing tensions. For instance, by purposefully evoking memory, hesitancy,

discomfort, and affect in our coaching dialogues (Aguilar, 2020; Gee, 2021; Matias, 2016), we are finding the preservice teachers and their mentors are more likely to shift their lenses from rigid constructions of teacher identity, into descriptive narratives of conceptualizing educational equity *alongside a teaching event*. In this way, they shift their conception of “good teaching” as a singular product, into “good teaching” as a process of responsive inquiry. Similarly, when we recognize justice as the shift toward inclusivity and belonging, we can prioritize seeing classroom data differently to aide us on this journey.

Closing

The diversity of thought required to provide the identity-safety and epistemological expansiveness our nation’s learners deserve will challenge educators for generations to come. Schooling inequity is upheld by systems (of people) that maintain reductionary rhetoric as a necessary evil out of their control. The feeling of *it’s-not-in-our-control* turns harm into a distanced object: non-human, political, or separate from the bodies that employ the ideas in their daily lives. Objectifying harm in this way contradicts the reality that people *are* actively intertwined within the systems. These notions hinder the impetus to deconstruct and reconsider the ontological, methodological nature of their role in how power works to liberate or oppress. Therefore, the onus to enact change is upon the *people*, such as ourselves, who actively participate in systems to adjust their participation based on their interactions with others.

Of course, this is a lifetime of learning and unlearning that must be done with others in response to inequities. As explored in this essay, the systems are solid and protected. All efforts to actualize a dynamic multiplicity of “good teaching” require risk and creativity. We urge readers to invite posthumanist notions of memory, discomfort, and affect as valuable analysis points to confront and question what may appear “natural” (Barad, 2007; Derrida, 2008) in schooling. “We are all responsible for removing what Charles Mills calls the personhood–subpersonhood line that justifies some receiving freely what others have to earn or demonstrate worthiness in order to receive” (Adair & Colegrove, 2021, p. 5). We accept this charge.

Note

¹ For this conceptual essay, we differentiate Whiteness as a dominant discourse with a capital W from white as an identifiable body, which we lowercase. Though these representations are not fully realized as separate in many

hearts and minds, we resist conflating the white body with Whiteness in order to examine the conditions of their aggregation in teaching discourses.

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Chalk Dust in the Wind

An Examination of the Demoralized Teacher

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Abstract

Teacher burnout is now a significant issue in K-12 schools due to an unparalleled global COVID-19 pandemic. However, this burnout has roots in the demoralization of the teaching workforce, which is nothing new to the profession. This paper focuses on bringing light to the underlying reasons for this demoralization, steeped in classroom realities and the very nature of the profession. The paper draws on findings from an examination of research in order to show that teachers are largely demoralized due to their historically devalued status, the isolation and stress inherent in the profession, and the very “semi-profession” upon which the field stands. The analysis shows that something more is needed to fill the cup of teachers, who are beaten down by these historical and modern-day realities. The paper argues that relational trust may be one of those cup-filling modalities and concludes by suggesting that a century of recycled reforms calls for deeper and bolder action, and most particularly ones that bolster respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity.

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Keywords: demoralization, educational policy, professional identity, reform, relational trust, teacher wellbeing, teaching as a profession

Introduction

Larry Cuban penned a seminal piece in 1990 entitled “Reforming Again, Again and Again” which chronicles recurring waves of school reform from the days of Horace Mann on forward. In it, he depicts reform movements undulating for decades without much visible impact on teaching practice. The problem is so widely recognized that other historians now also chronicle these movements (Cuban, 1984, 1990; Ravitch, 2010, 2014; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Elmore (1996) contends that schools “change” all the time—adopting this or that new schedule, textbook, or tracking system—yet never impact in any fundamental way how teachers and students interact. Reformers continue to try, and experts continue to generate hypotheses to account for reform failures while proffering solutions for change. The sad fact remains that most reforms don’t work because they fail to acknowledge the realities of the classroom teacher.

This article explores realities of classroom teachers that place them in a demoralized context. First, it looks at the historical status of teaching. Then it examines the isolation and stress inherent in an autonomous classroom. Finally, the very “semi-ness” of the profession is examined, which further depreciates the career’s currency. Moreover, some relief is offered in the form of “relational trust,” to combat this demoralization and build the teacher back up. While certainly no silver bullet, relational trust offers a framework of viewing the teacher as a whole person with inherent need for community and trustful bonds with other school personnel.

Teacher Realities

Much has been written on the mismatch between reformer ideals and teacher realities. Kennedy (2005) juxtaposed teacher lines of thinking against policy demands to bolster her claim that reformers must ultimately adapt their ideals to the world of classroom teachers. Among other premises, she maintains that reforms, while not only incompatible with teacher dispositions and circumstances, can actually work to *impede* teacher practice. Similarly, Cohen’s (1990) now-famous Mrs. Oublier depicts a teacher’s notion of implementation skewing far from the reformers’ intended target. Huberman (1995), too, found teachers who were uninterested in reform, either because they disagreed with the reform’s intent or because they had been involved in, disappointed

by, and tired by an earlier initiative. Whether unreasonable, time consuming, or poorly adapted, policy reforms not only waste teacher and student time, but perhaps harm their commitment to learning in the long run.

The *No Child Left Behind* legislation heralded an era of even higher stress promulgated by high-stakes reforms and sanctions. In a study of the impact of high-stakes reforms, Valli and Buese (2007) found an environment where teachers related to students differently, enacted pedagogies at odds with their own visions of best practice, and experienced high levels of stress. What's more, the externally-driven mandates resulted in discouragement, role ambiguity, and superficial responses. The researchers conceded that such unfortunate byproducts might have been permissible if the reform had actually increased student performance, but "that did not seem to be the case" (p. 520). When teachers' work becomes excessively and externally regulated, unintended consequences occur. Such consequences result in lowered job satisfaction, reduced commitment and self-esteem, and early departure from the profession.

Further depreciating the emotionally drained teacher is the "organizational irrationality" of the urban school. According to Payne (2008), who researched public schools in Chicago, such "clinically depressed" (p. 53) climates not only wasted existing resources (financial, social, or otherwise) but also summarily rejected new ones if and when they become available. Payne contends that distrustful people have difficulty learning from one another, and that "beaten down adults" (p. 20) treading charred social webbing have little reason to share ideas with one other *much less implement new reforms*. Triage and self-preservation are the norm, a culture of "cover your own butt" and "is it in the contract?" (p. 45) informs teacher lines of thinking, and reform interests are placed on the back burner, if at all on the stove.

Finally, we know from historians Tyack and Cuban (1995) that teachers are left behind almost exclusively from the policy arena, that nebulous body which calls most of their shots. To the degree that teachers are out of the policy loop in designing and adopting school reforms, "it is not surprising if they drag their feet in implementing them." (p. 135). Indeed, teachers do not corner the entire market of educational wisdom, but they do have unique, first-hand perspectives. What's more, they are the ones who carry out the directives. As "street level bureaucrats" (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977, p. 176), teachers hold the requisite discretion and institutional knowledge to make decisions about their pupils that add up to *de facto* policies over time which fit their particular classroom. We know that teachers make their mark on

policy by adapting, layering, and hybridizing at the practical level, but it might just empower them to know they had a hand at crafting the policy in the first place.

Demoralization

Santoro (2011) asserts that demoralization is an inability to access the moral rewards of teaching; it can lead to feeling depressed, discouraged, shameful, and hopeless. In a culture accustomed to blaming teachers for problems that are systemic, it is easy to rely on the shorthand of “burnout” to describe the source of teacher attrition. However, eschewing “burnout” and examining “demoralization” more closely, Santoro (2011) argues, may provide a way to confront the problem systematically rather than bearing the burden on a personal level.

The problem is not new. In Rousmaniere’s (1997) history of teaching in 1920s New York, she contends that city teachers experienced reform initiatives as contradictory intrusions into their already stressful workday. One of the first ways she identified discouragement came from their increased workload without requisite reward. During this time period, schools were identified as the agencies which would support and socialize the expanding youth population. It was here where classrooms took on the mantle of the all-encompassing social service network, a trend which continues to this day. Indeed, in Rousmaniere’s 1920s New York, the teacher was expected to address and assuage the problems of the poor, illiterate, unhealthy, badly behaved, gang-affiliated, and non-English speaking child. Such intensification may have been fair if it had brought with it commensurate compensation and support, but it did not.

Is asking a teacher to be so many things with so little reward demanding too much? And how much of that trend has continued? According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), the remnants of the hierarchical command structure installed by schools by the administrative progressives early in the century still, to this day, undermine teacher autonomy. What’s more, layered on top of such expectations are vapid federal and state regulations that have burgeoned in the past three decades. And instead of providing commensurate compensation and support, administrators place their bets on the other constant of the teaching profession: regulatory paperwork. “Facing reams of forms to fill out,” Tyack and Cuban joke, “overworked educators often feel more like professional accountants than like accountable professionals” (p. 139). Few schools give teachers the incentives or time for their own curricular planning, and self-sustaining professional development is

almost nonexistent. The day becomes about managing the concerns of the class in front of you while leaving a good paper trail. Where is the professional reward?

One might think that teachers, lacking support and compensation, might instead catapult up a respectable career ladder and attain a highly-desirable status. Sadly, this is historically not the case, either. Sociologist Lortie (1975) has noted that the work of teaching itself does not change much throughout one's career. Such is to say, the responsibilities of a 30-year veteran are virtually the same as those of a first-year novice. We might say such a profession is "career less" or lacking any meaningful professional ladder. Speaking of ladders, under most district's lanes-and-ladders compensation formulas, little reward or recognition exists for extra effort: The 30-year veteran who clocks in and out with the students makes more than the eager post-graduate who puts in college-level hours for the job. Kennedy (2005) maintains that such circumstances encourage teachers not to think of their profession as a prestigious vocation, but rather something that "does not require substantial intellectual or emotional investment" (p. 16).

Lortie (1975) also lists other features of teachers' work that discourage them from approaching it with pride and rigor. For example, he notes that there is virtually no induction into the profession. That is, teachers become fully responsible for their own classrooms just a few months after they themselves complete school. The transition can be sudden and oftentimes without a guide, thus reinforcing the notion that teaching is idiosyncratic and depends heavily on natural talent. In addition to unrealistic expectations, the teacher's craft is further stymied by "the absence of concrete models for emulation, unclear lines of influence, multiple and controversial criteria, ambiguity about assessment timing, and instability in the product" (Lortie, 1975, p. 136). Such ambiguity makes it difficult to know whether students are really mastering material and even harder to do so while managing mandates from both above and below. These uncertainties incentivize teachers to seek more tangible goals in the interim and "aim simply to move through the textbook" (Kennedy, 2005, p. 120) rather than ensure students grapple with, debate, master and make their own difficult ideas and concepts. Indeed, a career-less profession, fraught with ambiguity and instability, is not the picture of a healthy career.

The Historical Status of Teachers

Who has historically taken on the yoke of this thankless, money-less, career-less profession? We know that in the earliest days of the re-

public, the profession was staffed by young, middle-class white men on their way to becoming lawyers or ministers. However, as industry and business became more commonplace, men left the teaching profession for more lucrative careers. By the early 20th century, almost four out of five teachers were women (Sedlak & Schlossman, 1986). Furthermore, since the time when women began to dominate the profession, the occupation's image, status, and desirability became suspect in the American mind. Teaching was seen as women's work, as something to move in and out of, more of a holding pen until women were married with households and children of their own. Men, on the other hand, rose to be administrators who then delivered technocratic top-down mandates which poorly-paid and insufficiently-organized women were then expected to enact (Mehta, 2013b). It is no wonder reforms fail when played upon such a scenario.

However, women were not the only ones who took the brunt of society's disdain for teachers. According to Berry (2011), the profession's standing in American society has been historically devalued by its sheer conspicuousness. That is, most of us have attended and observed at least 12 years of public school, and most of us pretty much know what goes on in a classroom setting. When it comes down to it, we could, if forced, teach any subject from elementary to high school by looking at the teacher's edition and remembering what we ourselves did. Indeed, that is the model upon which *Teach for America* and its numerous spin-offs have thrived. Labaree (1999) notes teachers are "way too familiar and too visible, and what they know seems to be all too common" (p. 22) for the profession to accumulate some cred. After all, how hard can it be to sit with a group of kids for six hours and deliver a district-mandated curriculum? Is it any surprise, then, teachers are frequently mocked for their assumed lack of intelligence and perceived inability to compete in the larger labor force? Lest we forget: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." Indeed, the very conspicuousness and eased entry of the profession devalues it for men and women alike.

Isolation and Stress

Here one might trade the extra workload, low pay, lack of respect, and unrealistic accountability for the one thing teachers have more of than most careers: autonomy. Undeniably, a teacher can retreat to her classroom and make the world come alive for her students. She need not attend tedious cubicle meetings nor hassle with passive-aggressive coworkers. Her spacious classroom really is her office where

the payoffs from illuminating a child's mind are legion. Autonomy, however, carries its own price tag in the form of extreme isolation. Rousmaniere's (1997) 1920s teachers expressed that they worked in a "strangely lonely environment" very much isolated from their colleagues. They were further sequestered due to the popular ideology at the time that emphasized individual responsibility over collaboration. She found that "the professional teacher was defined by educators as a self-restrained and self-monitoring individual, uninterested in financial rewards and oblivious to working conditions" (p. 4). In the nation's largest city, teachers were taught to stand apart and quietly perform their duties, sanctimoniously accepting their dismal working conditions and lot in life. And it wasn't just happening in New York. She identifies the Chicago superintendent from 1909 until 1919 as remarking "isolation in schools" caused the worst educational problems at the time. Later, Lortie (1975) found that it was teaching's "egg-crate-like structure" which isolated teachers from colleagues and reinforced a culture in which everyone tried hard not to stand out.

But it's not just a physical isolation from which teachers suffer, it's an intellectual one, as well. Teachers spend a good portion of their workday with children and rarely interact with adult peers. And the effort to make curriculum understandable takes a harder-than-it-looks psychological dive back into the mind of a child or adolescent. Meanwhile, managing a slew of rapid-fire interruptions, teachers have very little time to think and process. Kennedy (2005) cites Jackson's (1968) classic study, *Life in Classrooms*, to affirm that classrooms are crowded and rife with distractions. "Even when events appear to be peaceful and orderly, the threat of disorder, distraction, and loss of control is always present" (p. 64). Indeed, the most expertly-managed classrooms fall victim to an almost constant stream of disturbances from fellow faculty, pull-out personnel, administrators, and intercom proclamations. Lacking any real cerebral stimulation, along with relentless fight-or-flight distractions, teachers are left with an intellectual isolation perhaps far greater than the egg-crate-like structure of which Lortie (1975) speaks.

We know that community is important in schools and that "relational trust" is a major part of building community and contributing to a school's overall success (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2009). And no surprise, the aforementioned stark conditions of teaching create higher than normal teacher turnover. The ideology of autonomy, coupled with high attrition rates, makes it very difficult to construct any closely-knit school community. Indeed, Lortie (1975) maintains that since the time of the common school, the "continual coming and

going” of staff members has mitigated against any meaningful teamwork. Ironically, the profession which helps to build our very communities suffers a community-less identity itself. Lortie also raises the salient point that, historically, schools with predominantly married women could not count on them to spend long hours on coordinated efforts. This predominately female faculty “found it difficult to expend time and energy beyond the formal work schedule” (p. 16) since they had husbands and children back home to which they must attend. Hence, community—not only crucial for student achievement but also an important intangible reward—got bypassed, and women inherited another reason for their work to be devalued.

And finally, if the historical record of teacher devaluation were not depressing enough, a form of helplessness also characterized their role. Lortie (1975) summarizes the teachers he examined as follows:

There is a certain ambivalence, then, in the teacher’s sentiments. He yearns for more independence, greater resources, and just possibly, more control over key resources. But he accepts the hegemony of the school system on which he is economically and functionally dependent. He cannot ensure that the imperatives of teaching, as he defines them, will be honored, but he chafes when they are not. He is poised between the impulse to control his work life and the necessity to accept its vagaries; perhaps he holds back partly because he is at heart uncertain that he can produce predictable results. (p. 186)

A Semi-Profession

Further complicating matters is the perception of the profession as weak and, hence, subject to external, technocratic models of control (Mehta, 2013). “Unless educators develop the characteristics associated with more developed professions,” Mehta writes, “it will remain at the whim of external actors and logics seeking to control the field” (p. 38). Mehta argues that the teaching profession’s historical low status and feminization have afforded teachers only pint-sized power over their craft. Teaching has generally been seen as a “semi-profession” which lacks the status, training, entry control, and base knowledge which other careers typically enjoy. As a result, the profession falls prey to assaults on both its legitimacy and authority. Here he talks about one of the most severe assaults resulting from the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Among other things, *A Nation at Risk* posited that children were not prepared for the future and the nation’s school system was to blame. A flurry of reforms ensued.

Mehta (2013) writes that after *A Nation at Risk*, the Carnegie Foundation formed a task force to offer recommendations of its own.

A Nation Prepared advocated a new system in which teachers had greater control and discretion over their work. The authors admitted that teaching conditions “more nearly resembled those of semi-skilled workers on the assembly line rather than those of other professionals” (in Mehta, p. 125) and so recommended a three-pronged vision for the profession built upon teacher authority, defined standards for entry/best practice, and a more professional conception of the craft which moved beyond collective bargaining. Sadly, however, the three-part agenda lost steam after it left Carnegie and played itself out in the national policy arena.

Once president and now senior fellow of the Carnegie Foundation, Anthony Bryk advocated a new form of school improvement: relational trust. The interesting thing about relational trust is that, by definition, it builds relations among people by instilling trust and high personal regard. It also starts small, at the individual school, and cannot be technocratically mandated from above. Would such an idealist vision for the profession catch on? And has it really worked to improve schools?

Relational Trust

Intuitively, when an organization’s employees relate well and trust one another, they are more productive and satisfied in their work. Bryk et al. (2009) highlight this point with a decade-long study of over 400 Chicago public elementary schools. By studying the outcomes of the *Chicago School Reform Act* of 1988 and its early 1990s decentralization (Hess, 1995), the research team successfully chronicled an elusive, cost-effective school improvement measure which they credited to relational trust.

Through case studies and longitudinal data, the researchers discovered a curious phenomenon: one school advanced while others lagged behind, despite both schools beginning with the same demographics, poverty level, and initial test scores. Bryk and his team found that the schools with high relational trust measures were more likely to demonstrate improvements in student learning. Moreover, their improvements were quite astounding: At the end of the study, schools with low relational trust scores had only a *one in seven* chance of improving. In contrast, half the schools that scored high on relational trust were in the improved group. And on average and over a five-year period, the improved group increased by 8 percent in reading and 20 percent in math (Bryk et al., 2009).

For those new to the concept, Bryk and Schneider (2002) define

relational trust as a combination of both inter- and intra-personal respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity. Furthermore, they describe each characteristic as follows: Respect means to genuinely listen to one another and take other views into account. Personal regard describes a willingness to extend oneself beyond formal contract requirements. Competence is when actions produce desired results and everyone capably performs their required actions. Finally, personal integrity demands a certain ethical perspective to guide one's actions and words (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The authors describe how these four elements reduce risks associated with change, thus freeing up communication channels and allowing meaningful reforms to take hold. Relational trust makes teachers more willing to trust the principal, parents more willing to trust teachers, and all stakeholders more willing "to go the extra mile" for their students.

Why might "going the extra mile" for students make all the difference? Schools are inherently social enterprises, and social enterprises depend, one might argue quite heavily, on cooperative endeavors among the varied participants. Relational trust is the "connective tissue" that binds all these participants together (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) around a shared goal of advancing the education, wellbeing, thriving states, and future life chances of all children. Improving schools requires us to think more comprehensively about how to best organize the work and stature of the adults who work within school walls so that this connective tissue remains vigorous. From a policy perspective, we should ask whether any new initiative is likely to increase relational trust or hamper it.

Why do policymakers rarely make mention of relational trust? Perhaps it is enduringly esoteric and not quite quantifiable. After all, educators have their hands full "racing to the top" while "making schools accountable" utilizing "value added models" so that they won't "leave any child behind." As Bryk and Schneider (2002) attest, though, relational trust is the ingredient which allows meaningful reforms to take hold. What's more, other studies indicate teachers are more motivated to enact when they feel authentic buy-in. According to Turner (2001), unless teachers believe in and help structure new role expectations, they are unlikely to be wholeheartedly involved in enacting the reform.

Conclusion

If we can't stop the onslaught of technocratic, top-down mandates that serve to demoralize teachers, the least we can do is develop a teaching force built upon relational trust. Perhaps then the most sa-

lient reforms can take hold, teachers can feel more involved in the reform process, the semi-profession can ascend to full stature, schools can become more humane places in which to work, and authentic advancement can occur for everyone—teachers and students alike. Recall that John Dewey provided an alternative model for progressive school organization (Dewey, 1928) in the last century, which as we know, lost to the bureaucratic machine. But in Dewey’s Chicago laboratory school, there was no need to bifurcate employees into teachers and researchers, leaders and policy experts, because everyone was interested in the same thing: improving learning for all. Rather than have “one expert dictating educational methods and subject matter to a body of passive, recipient teachers,” Dewey instead supported “the adoption of intellectual initiative, discussion, and decision throughout the entire school corps” (in Mehta, 2013b, p. 32). However, if we never will escape the idea of teachers as widgets and top-down autocratic mandates as levers, at least we can provide the machine with the grease it needs to run smoothly in the form of relational trust.

Ancient sages and modern scientists all seem to agree that the key to happiness is strong bonds with other people. Indeed, the basic premise of social capital theory is that social networks hold value, both positive and negative. We would do well to ask ourselves how some of the positive consequences of social capital (mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness) can be maximized while some of the negative consequences (tribalism, nepotism, corruption) can be minimized. As Putnam (2000) reminds us, we’ve become increasingly disconnected from one another in the form of disintegrated social structures, and these fragmented ties diminish both our physical and civic health. However, these same relationships, if restored, are crucial for creating a society that is happy, well educated, healthy, and safe.

Indeed, we must have reasons for hope, and we must foreground these as much as we do critique, if we are to mobilize the next generation of citizens among our future educators. That said, however, in the broader context of educational and sociopolitical discourse, it is worth noting that the dominant critical view of educational and social institutions often assumes, as this paper does, that the problem we face is mostly one of education: that is, with proper education, the masses would see things as we educated critical thinkers do. The world as it currently stands, however, could very well be taken to suggest otherwise.

That said, a century of recycled reforms should at least force us to consider the hypothesis that external approaches to reform do not produce schools that function well. Perhaps the answer lies within, in the intellectual, social, and emotional capital of a strong teaching staff.

Darling-Hammond (1999) reminds us that schools centered on learners are not only intellectually rigorous places, but also exciting, humane places in which both students and teachers thrive. Such schools develop potential and provide an ability to think freely and independently. Indeed, in the contentious world of education, a rebuilt teaching force which sees the individual teacher not as demoralized widget but rather vibrant capital worth investing in is indeed a challenge, but perhaps a utopia worth at least tinkering toward.

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“Is Anybody Doing Anything?”

Policy Actors Discuss Supports for Displaced Learners at Ohio’s Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

According to UNHCR (2023), 6% of refugees currently access higher education worldwide. In light of this pressing equity crisis, it is

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important to understand the policies currently in place to support displaced learners across national and regional landscapes. Using Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) and applying an intersectional lens, this paper analyzes a single US state context, Ohio, and finds a pervasive policy silence identified by policy actors based at colleges and universities. This policy gap spans federal, state, and institutional levels, consistent with nascent literature on the US policy context (Luu & Blanco, 2021; Unangst et al. 2022). Our discussion focuses on higher education access policies, pointing to a lack of consistency in the language used by both policy and policy actors around displaced students. Further, we address the implications of “incidental” policy and programmatic support being provided to displaced students via established student service infrastructures rather than targeted or intentional support. We also explore how external funders do and may influence the development of policy centering displaced learners.

Introduction

In the last decade humanitarian crises have displaced millions of people across the globe. In the United States (US) it was estimated that 95,000 Afghans would be resettled by September 2022, with the executive branch requesting \$6.4 billion in Congressional allocations to support that resettlement process (Young, 2021). Tens of thousands of Ukrainians—and others fleeing that country—were also admitted to the US in 2022 (The White House, 2022). These individuals joined an estimated 325,000 Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders (that figure being current as of 2017) (Warren and Kerwin, 2017), in addition to 100,000 refugees admitted between fiscal years 2017-2020 (Baugh, 2022). Over 100,000 individuals were also granted asylum either affirmatively or defensively between 2019-2020; this figure excludes follow-to-join asylees (Baugh, 2022). Together, the concentration of displaced persons in the US is at the highest level since the end of the Vietnam war, with the individuals in question holding a range of legal statuses, e.g., refugee, parolee, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), and TPS (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2021). Still others were US residents at the time of conflict in their home country and have applied for asylum, attempting to move from, for example, a student visa to a protected status.

How many displaced students are enrolled at US Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)? No comprehensive data set is presently available to answer this question; displaced individuals enter the US at every life stage, with new arrivals of “traditional” college-going age seeking to access higher education shortly after resettlement, childhood arrivals completing elementary and secondary education in the US before

pursuing college, and adults accessing education to retrain, to qualify for their profession in the American context, or to improve language skills (Unangst et al., 2022). Further, the legal status of displaced learners may change prior to or during college enrollment: refugees, for example, may “apply for lawful permanent resident status after 1 year in the United States” (USCIS, 2019).

Broadly, then, what can we say about the number of displaced people present in the US? In short, there is a significant grouping of displaced learners who might pursue higher education in the US, yet this population has been the focal point of limited scholarship. To our knowledge, the project at hand is the first attempt to capture the breadth of formal and informal policies supporting college access among displaced learners holding intersectional identities across a single state context: Ohio.

Framing Numbers

It is useful to offer a few framing statistics pointing to higher education pathways in Ohio, the country’s seventh-most populous state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). New American Economy (2017, 2021) has estimated that 64,261 refugees were resident in Ohio as of 2021, and that in 2015, refugees contributed 102.5 million dollars in state and local tax revenue. Between 2016-18, the top five sending countries for Ohio-based refugees were: Bhutan (30.6%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (22.3%), Somalia (12.6%), Syria (10.3%) and Iraq (5.6%). As of 2019, most refugees in Ohio lived in five counties hosting large cities: Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Montgomery, and Summit (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 2021). In 2018, the state accepted the third most refugees nationally in absolute numbers (National Immigration Forum, 2020). Between 2017-2019, 1,077 Ohio residents were granted asylum affirmatively (Baugh, 2020), and as of 2018, 7.4% of all Somalian Temporary Protected Status holders in the country resided in Ohio (The Temporary Protected Status Advocacy Working Group, 2021). In short, considering those with approved, pending, and temporary status as well as their minor children, Ohio likely hosts tens of thousands of displaced individuals seeking access to some type of higher education in the state; the US State Department’s (2023) decision to authorize private refugee sponsorship is likely to drive this figure still higher. Indeed, as of fall 2018, 75.6% of students at Ohio HEIs were state residents (Ruiz, 2020).

Comparative Context

Armed conflicts, environmental crises, and other drivers in the last ten years have resulted in the highest number of displaced people worldwide since the end of the second world war (UNHCR, 2014). Waves of displaced learners have catalyzed the creation of a menu of services across HEIs globally: credential evaluation, language training via pathway programs, buddy and mentoring programs, the opportunity to audit classes, and so forth (e.g., Hartley et al., 2018; Sontag, 2019). Further, regional compacts have been established relevant to higher education access (e.g., Sarmiento, 2014).

Comparative national cases reflect a range of policy approaches to supporting displaced learners. In response to the Ukrainian crisis, 44 British universities (as of May 2022) had engaged in twinning programs with Ukrainian universities, sharing virtual lectures and providing materials to rebuild physical infrastructure (Fazackerley, 2022), though at the national level Ukrainian students were first told that they would be treated “the same as a UK resident for higher education funding,” which would still have meant thousands of pounds per year in tuition (UK Government, 2022), followed by the announcement of four million in federal funding to be issued directly to HEIs with Ukrainian or Ukrainian-domiciled students enrolled (Office for Students, 2022). The Austrian national system, in contrast, established a tuition waiver spanning all public universities and university colleges of teacher education (Federal Ministry of Austria Education Science and Research, 2022). A 2019 Eurydice report examining 22 European systems of higher education found that 19 national policies did not address this population at all (European Commission et al., p. 13). In the German case, a comprehensive policy response utilized prior learning assessment, “bridging programmes, guidance and counselling services and financial support” tied to specific budget allocations to support this group (European Commission et al., 2019, p. 13). In response to Syrian displacement, the Turkish higher education system initiated Arabic-language degree programs on the Syrian border, offering both tuition-free status as well as scholarships to refugee students (a policy so generous that backlash from domestic students ensued) (Ergin et al., 2019).

While the decentralized US higher education system has generally failed to engage in policy innovation in response to the needs of displaced learners, it is not alone in this regard. In the Australian setting one may observe a gap between policy supports for approved refugees and asylees and those with pending status: asylum-seekers “are treat-

ed as international students and are ineligible for Federal Government financial assistance programs (Hartley et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2019)” leaving 23 of 43 Australian HEIs to offer stopgap institutional scholarships to “refugees and asylum-seeking students” (Dunwoodie et al., 2020, p. 5). Similarly, while the German system has been lauded for its comparatively robust investment in refugee education, persistent service gaps remain: public university webpages aimed at displaced learners are predominantly in German only (rather than offering parallel content in Arabic, Pashto, etc.) and largely center cis-gender men (Unangst, 2020). Relevant calls for policy attention to the intersectional identities of displaced youth have begun to appear across the nationally-focused literatures and in comparative work alike (e.g., Moffit et al., 2020; Molla, 2020; Kuzhabekova & Nardon, 2021): Fincham (2022) has referred to the need to counteract a “depoliticization of refugee identities through humanitarianism” (p. 318) or a tendency to prioritize the displaced identity above all other salient identities.

Literature Review

Migration and education policies in the US reflect an entrenched history of racialization specific to the US context though not exclusive to it (e.g., Cheran, 2001; Ficarra, 2017; Gans, 2017; Hategekimana, 2023; Whalen, 2006). With regard to migration policy, systems of exclusion based on religion, race, and other essentialized identities have produced politically weighted, temporally distinct processes granting varied forms of legal protection (e.g., Hua, 2010; Lau, 2006). In recent years, Syrian refugees have experienced racialization threatening their sense of security and well-being (Gowayed, 2020), and regionally-specific processes of racialization more broadly impact the resettlement experience of displaced persons across the US (Guerrero, 2016; Kawahara, et al., 2022), holding salience for their everyday lives.

Recent literature exploring the intersections of racialization, xenophobia, coloniality, migration, and education has parsed continued policy-based efforts to exclude learners from pathways to higher education as well as K-12 education. For example, Kuelzer and Houser (2019) point to how “Central and South American immigrants have become targets of oppressive legislation” and offer as example Oklahoma’s 2007 passage of House Bill 1804, which made “knowingly or unknowingly give any sort of aid or assistance to undocumented immigrants” a felony, and which resulted in a drop in Latino enrollment within the Tulsa Public Schools estimated at around 25,000 Latino students (p. 41). Federal efforts persist as well: Jenny J. Lee (2020) has

identified the targeting of Chinese university students in the US by the Department of Homeland Security as a reflection of neo-racism.

Conceptual Framework

Intersectionality is a concept that was created to convey the limits of language, policy, and legal structure in centering marginalized groups in the US setting. Crenshaw (2015) offers the example of Black women being discriminated against in a workplace that hired Black men and White women, thereby giving the appearance of not engaging in racist and sexist practices. Upon closer examination, the company was hiring Black men for specific jobs and White women for others, leading to both discriminatory practices for these groups as well as erasure of Black women. In short, race and gender equity laws often fail to account for people who have more than one marginalized identity and frequently fail to attend to intersecting, salient identities that influence lived experience (e.g., Spade, 2013).

In terms of higher education in the United States, intersectionality presents challenges to both the traditional language and infrastructure of identity-based services. As an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, Second Wave Feminism, and other social justice movements, identity-based programs and offices emerged on college campuses. Because this structure largely mirrors movements that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, today's identity-based programs tend to be organized around race, gender, and sexual orientation. Scholars have pointed out the challenges in this structure as students' identities do not always fit neatly into one of these categories (Duran, 2021). To put it another way, how do HEI historicities perpetuate exclusion (Heidegger, 1962), and by extension, how do HEIs employ intersectionality to parse those institutional histories and presents, iterating student services in tandem?

The erasure of student experience is a danger associated with the current identity-based structure adopted by many HEIs. For example, one of the authors worked on a campus in which Muslim students advocated for a center shortly after 9/11 when Islamophobia had reached new heights. Though the discrimination they faced was significant, the university refused to add a new center, arguing that it could not afford to erect a new building, hire staff, and allocate a budget line for an indefinite number of affinity groups. The idea seemed to be that if a group was not grandfathered into the old race/gender/sexual orientation infrastructure, those students would have to find another way to address their needs.

As we approached the current research on displaced students,

we suspected the aforementioned problem might be the case for this group. In our initial inquiry into programs and services for displaced students, we did not come across any language or infrastructure that indicated migrant students' visibility on any campus. We were motivated to examine this erasure in the context of how policies, practices, language, and structures privilege some groups while disenfranchising others, thereby drawing attention to the systems activating that erasure. For us, the following conceptualization is informative: "intersectionality as an analytic and political commitment to challenging the systems, infrastructures, and logics that inflict violence on those deemed 'out of place' by fortress nation-states" (Carastathis et al., 2018, p. 8). Here, the intersectional framework is understood as disrupting power imbalance and simultaneously preempting justification for a lack of attention to structures of oppression by way of constrained resource environments, both national and institutional.

Methods and Initial Findings

This project employs Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) as conceptual framework (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020; Chase et al., 2014). CPA problematizes a value-neutral linear consideration of policy and instead frames policy as both problem and solution: it considers what is absent as well as what is present, what policy reacts to as well as what it creates (Cheek and Gibson, 1997). To put it another way, CPA considers "discursive practices that create, share, and produce truth claims that can be questioned" (Hernández, 2013, p. 51): the policy-making process itself. This necessitates attention to the strategic decontextualization of entrenched problems, a tactic employed by "state apparatuses structured around the economic market" (Marshall, 1999, p. 63). By extension, CPA considers policy as a practice of power and (re)producer of inequity (Allan et al., 2010) and is therefore a useful tool for the consideration of how existing institutional, state, and HEI policy frameworks around displacement are both structured and understood by those faculty and staff who interpret and enact them.

Participants

The HEIs included in this study are: Ohio's 14 public universities and 23 community colleges, as well as the 51 accredited, private institutions that are members of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio. We selected this pool to broadly sample faculty and staff perceptions of relevant policy, and to allow for the possibility that the range of resources, locations, and institutional missions

across public and private sectors may influence those structures and perceptions. We reached out to one faculty or staff member at each HEI, recruiting interview participants based on:

- (1) their employment status at one of the 88 sampled HEIs.
- (2) participation in a program of displaced student outreach/admission/support.
- (3) availability for a Zoom interview between February to April 2022.

Prospective interview participants were identified based on college or university website listing of their affiliation with (in order of preference): displaced students, immigrant students, new students, or general student services. We also contacted participants through referral by colleagues. Eight interviews were conducted in total.

Data Collection

Data collection used a two-tiered approach to support a nuanced understanding of the policy framing faculty and staff understandings of displaced student support. As a **first stage**, we collected relevant HEI website data on existing supports for displaced learners. Research team members used searches of the 88 HEI homepages to gather relevant data using search terms refugees, asylee, asylum, temporary protected status (TPS), immigrant, and displaced. In the **second stage**, team members interviewed faculty and staff via Zoom in approximately 30 to 45-minute conversations and using a semi-structured interview protocol.

Data Analysis

To analyze state higher education policy, institutional policy, and faculty and staff perceptions of displaced student support and their work as policy actors, we drew from CPA and used a combination of inductive and deductive coding (based on key pillars of state-based education policy around displaced learners) to code interview transcripts. Relevant deductive codes included: incidental/accidental services for displaced learners; connection to non-profit/civil society groups; English language instruction (or ELL); tuition; funding streams; lack of awareness of best practice in the field; and lack of data on displaced learners. Each interview transcript was coded independently by two members of the research team. Through a series of memos and collaborative coding practice, we finalized a codebook and identified themes emerging from interview transcripts. This data was analyzed in conjunction with the findings of CPA applied to state and HEI policies

related to displaced learners. In a final step, we considered our findings in light of the extant domestic and international literature on the education of displaced learners to situate the range of policy and programmatic initiatives.

Findings

Data and Service Gaps Are Persistent But Not Universal

As noted our data collection process involved reviewing websites of public and private HEIs in Ohio to identify web-based information regarding services for displaced students. While we found webpages nested within university websites that used the terms refugee, asylee, TPS-holder, or displaced—for example the international students' section of the Ohio State University undergraduate admission site (2022)—we did not find any stand-alone webpages outlining services for displaced learners. In stage one, then, our findings indicated that a prospective college student seeking to access tailored information about services for displaced learners like themselves would not find a relevant website at an Ohio-based college or university. This lack of publicly available information around institutional policy and practice reflects a policy silence.

When, in stage two of our data collection process, we interviewed faculty and staff at eight public and private institutions, we garnered more and contradictory detail. Half of the HEI faculty and staff reported that there were no displaced students enrolled at their institutions, while several others referred to a steady “handful” of displaced students having been enrolled over time. We noted that several interview participants answered this question about data on enrollment trends by responding with information about international student enrollment, following that data by stating that few if any displaced students had been enrolled at the HEI in question. This leads us to believe that HEI stakeholders may be associating experiences of displacement exclusively with international students rather than with students holding a variety of legal statuses, but (potentially) resident in the US for a long period of time. For example, one staff member in an admissions unit stated

We've had some students coming from all over the world from different places that maybe have added some challenges to their experiences in the past, but given that it's a small number to begin with there, as far as I know, we don't have necessarily specific programs or specific support that we have for these students.

Several community and regional teaching college staff whose campuses were in rural areas referred to their geographic location as a reason why displaced students were not enrolled at their institutions. One of these staffers went into some detail about how the location of the campus was perceived as inconvenient by many international students in the sense that public transportation was not readily available. Here again, there seems to be a disjunction between a more broad and inclusive definition of displacement—engaging those learners resident in the US prior to study—and a narrower definition of displacement as learners arriving from other national contexts and immediately pursuing higher education.

The majority of interview participants in our study did not identify campus support services centering displaced students. Moreover, the majority of participants either stated or implied that there was no need for such services given low enrollment of displaced learners, though they could not always identify how many learners were or had been enrolled at the institution. Using the Critical Policy Analysis lens, we understand this perceived low demand for service as problematic given the concentration of displaced learners in Ohio and lack of cohesive data on displaced learners at the HEI level, which we argue inhibit the formation of institutional policy. What persists in the stead of reliable, real-time information is a data vacuum and policy silence (Unangst et al, 2022).

In contrast to those faculty and staff reporting low enrollment and low service, we learned from one interview participant that their HEI had developed a new not-for-credit ELL program to serve displaced learners in the Columbus area. The idea in this case had been to potentially scaffold students into higher levels of ELL and perhaps degree programs; that HEI representative noted that they were aware of a similar program being run by a not-for-profit in the city that had such high demand it was regularly turning students away. Thus the Columbus-area example provides an alternative perspective in that the HEI was aware of significant demand for education among displaced people and had considered tiered support structures for part-time learners resident in the US for some time. Within the Ohio landscape, then, persistent data and service gaps around displaced learners are in evidence but are not reflected at all institutions studied here.

Funding of Programs a Central Issue ... with a Range of Possible Solutions

The question of funding was clearly top-of-mind for all interview participants: this related to the funding of financial aid/scholarships, to stand-alone programs serving displaced learners, and to general stu-

dent support activities. Given continued public disinvestment in higher education across the neoliberal US (e.g. Bullough, R.V., 2014), it is not surprising that funding emerged as a theme in our interviews. As Kliewer (2013) has written, “neoliberal ideology has changed the relationship between the market, civil society and the state” (p. 72). Thus, the HEI-based policy actors in focus here engage with both the uneven power structures of a market-oriented economy and a state-specific education system to achieve their distinct missions in distinct regional frameworks.

When asked which federal or state policies played an important role at the HEI and in the support of displaced students, we received a variety of answers. One respondent from a religiously affiliated institution grouped policies together under the heading of financial aid in identifying this category as the most important; they stated that “financial aid is primarily offered to residents or citizens of the United States... for some displaced populations that might be a significant, almost insurmountable hurdle just... in terms of gaining access.” Other interview participants identified particular financial aid programs (Pell came up several times) as vitally important, while still others identified programs related to legal status (specifically, students having access to green cards, DACA, and OPT). Another discussed the established IREX program at their institution, this being a yearlong Community Engagement Exchange Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. A community college Designated School Official (DSO) pointed to the performance-based funding model in Ohio – which privileges student completion – as failing to incentivize community colleges to recruit international students “because their main goal is to transfer and so we hardly have any international students complete here.” Broadly, though, what we heard was that federal policies were of central importance across student recruitment and report functions and that Ohio-specific policies played little if any role. We noted that the federal programs mentioned were not aimed at displaced students specifically but might have overlapped with some displaced students in some circumstances.

In several conversations interview participants discussed what funding streams drove financial aid as relevant to displaced students. One administrator identified external funding streams as centrally important to their institution’s international student enrollment, reporting that “seven years ago [over 90% of international students] were from Saudi Arabia because of the oil scholarships.” Another participant who worked in admissions and financial aid at a comparatively well-resourced college discussed the implications of the institution

meeting full need for admitted students; they reported that between five to ten percent of international student applicants needed financial support, and also that there wasn’t a specific admissions or financial aid program in place for that population. When asked whether conversations were taking place on campus around developing resources to support displaced learners, the response was no, but our respondent continued:

you know, we would really be looking ...if we wanted to, for many of these students at \$70,000, \$80,000 [for a full scholarship]. You know, to be able to endow those funds over four years, [we would be] looking for multimillion-dollar endowment funds for that to really make a difference other than just kind of naming a scholarship... That wouldn’t change our decision. They would really have to be almost fully funded for us to do that.

Here, we see both indication for the potential of donors to have an immediate impact on the higher education access of displaced learners, and also an indication of (perceived) institutional and state-level resistance to reallocating funds in support of new access initiatives. This contrasts with the willingness of institutions and policy actors to support the access of other equity groups through discounted or free tuition, among other initiatives (see for example the Ohio Reach Scholarship program (2023) serving youth formerly in the foster system). Further, we point to our earlier example of the new not-for-credit ELL program to serve displaced learners in the Columbus area: that program was funded by a single benefactor who himself identified as displaced. Clearly, then, various funding models for the expansion of policy exist and must be explored further.

The Terminology of Policy Liminality:

Displaced vs. Dislocated, National vs. International

When we say that displaced learners accessing or enrolled in US higher education experience policy liminality, we mean that they are positioned between discourses rather than being centered within a cohesive suite of federal, state, and institutional-level policy initiatives. Policy liminality has implications for the experiences of displaced learners—policy liminality in the cross-disciplinary literature has been found to impact “feelings of belonging and connection to services and society” in more economically developed countries (Pangas et al., 2019, p. 31)—and, given that our primary focus in this piece is on policy construction, indeed it holds implications for policy iteration.

Our review of HEI websites and conversations with policy actors

revealed that there is no codified language being used by stakeholders around displacement and those learners who identify histories of displacement. In short, while standardized language for other equity groups exists and some Ohio HEI websites use terms including asylee and refugee to reflect specific legal statuses, webpages were not consistent in whether or how they referred to those groups and did not address the umbrella concept of displacement (reflecting many legal statuses and emphasizing individual experience). Further reflecting this policy erasure, our interviews almost always involved participants asking us how we defined “displaced,” and in some cases, interview participants offered alternative or competing definitions. In one case, we spoke at length with an administrator of programs for displaced workers who had lost jobs due to circumstances beyond their control, with these workers being supported in postsecondary education by various federal programs including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Another staff member understood displaced students as referring to those experiencing homelessness, having recently left a sober living or domestic violence facility, or having recently been incarcerated.

In sum, we see enormous opportunity for an education and outreach campaign across higher education and policy training programs as well as professional development programs to codify an understanding of displaced learners as a distinct equity group with a range of competencies, lived experiences, preferences, and needs. In our view, professional associations such as the American Council on Education (ACE) and Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) are well positioned to lead that conversation and attendant training opportunities. If higher education policymakers, faculty, staff, and other constituents are not united in their understanding of this population as distinct, it will continue to experience erasure from the policy and student support realms. If displaced students are not named, they will not be supported. If they are not established as part of the equity context then student equity policy, research, and services will continue to be decontextualized.

Establishing Support Networks Facilitating Displaced Student Services ... or Not?

Our conversations with HEI policy actors frequently related something like: “our institution doesn’t have separate programs for displaced students but we hear about them through our student support network.” Frequently, interview participants would then mention robust, well-articulated formal and informal referral systems through

which faculty, staff, or other community members could designate a student as needing assistance. Assistance here was quite broad and included class-specific tutoring, food bank access, and other opportunities.

We do not imagine that every HEI would be able to sustain a center supporting displaced learners. In fact, we imagine that most HEIs in Ohio and beyond will indeed be most likely to tailor established equity centers, international centers, and student support networks to the needs of displaced learners and/or to engage with broader HEI networks to offer customized support (see Lowenhaupt & Scanlon, 2020). However, as argued elsewhere, it is vital that HEIs are intentional in how they

respond to explicit requests of refugee populations, [and] that they actively incorporate a transparent feedback loop as indicated by intersectional programs in other fields. In addition...an orientation toward sustainable program growth seems commensurate with an intersectional, social justice approach to refugee student support. (Unangst & Crea, 2020, p. 239)

Essentially, HEIs and state and national policy actors are called to provide resources (financial, human resources, or otherwise), leadership that reflects the range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of the population served and/or regularly informs their strategic, operational, and programming goals through learning alongside these minoritized communities. As they develop and iterate that policy, they must select “credible partners” and establish initiatives that offer equitable access (Thurston, 2016, p.101–2). Finally, it is vital to situate displaced learners as co-constructing these policies and attendant programs. We gesture here towards work on participatory policy making in the context of the neoliberal, highly differentiated US system in particular (Baccaro and Papadakis, 2008), understood as involving students as stakeholder group. As Dal Zotto and Fusari (2021) have put it in discussion of the University of Pavia, “the university enters the co-design process in a dual role. First, it is the institutional actor of the academic community. Second, at the national and international levels, it plays a decisive role in designing reception and inclusion policies” (p. 233).

Conclusion and Implications

The US landscape of migration and education policy is located at the nexus of systemic oppression and decades of public sector disinvestment, which have directly affected student access and experience. All HEIs, then, engage with racist and exclusionary institutional histo-

ries nested within racist and exclusionary federal and state policy. Our work considers how Ohio policies posit higher education as a public good for displaced learners, thereby advancing higher education access and success among students with a range of intersectional identities. We draw attention to the paucity of relevant policies across the state landscape but also to standout institutions and potentials: the development of a not-for-credit ELL program aimed at adult learners that envisioned the potential of transfer to credit-bearing programs; the impact of a single donor wanting to support displaced students; the interest of a HBCU in potentially recruiting students with histories of displacement from Africa.

Though it was not identified as an *in vivo* code across interview transcripts, we heard clearly through our conversations that service was a key value and skill at the heart of the work HEI-based policy actors engaged in. They spoke at length about work they did that extended beyond what they and/or coworkers considered “required” and frequently reflected on time-sensitive referrals from colleagues to support students who identified as international, ELL, or displaced (though this latter category was the small minority of cases). Our interview participants understood this as service to the HEI community, an understanding which is consistent with how US higher education professional organizations and training programs frame service. We also gleaned from several interviews that the faculty/staff in question referred students to local not-for-profit organizations for additional service. In short, the interview participants we engaged with actively contested policy limits through their own (sustained, often remarkable) service and their referral of learners to non-HEI, non-governmental service provided by community-based actors. HEI staff service, then, may dampen the effect of policy liminality for some learners at some HEIs.

For us, this circumstance begged the question: though individual policy actors located at Ohio HEIs routinely engage in service to displaced students (among others), what could we make of the service institutional and state policies offered by extension? Indeed, we considered whether the policies entities themselves, both institutional and state, promote examples of “service” in the stead of policy centering displaced learners. In other words, our findings seem to indicate further research on the topic of how institutional and state policies presume “service” across migration and education spheres and therefore frame the labor and resources of individual higher education staffers as well as college community stakeholders as permanent, necessary, and divesting the HEI or state from further investment.

In short, we find clear evidence of a policy vacuum, a data gap, a training disparity, and because of the profound lack of supportive policy it is difficult to identify any policies or programs as reflecting an intersectional approach in this area. Displaced learners are indeed at the fringe of several policy realms: equity policy (in the US context generally understood to involve “domestic” students), international education policy (generally understood to involve students traveling to the US for a credit-based program or one preparing students for a credit-based program), and outward-referrals to come-one-come-all community (sometimes religious) relief programs.

Broadly, we understand this state of play as dissonant with higher education as public good. If higher education is for all, we would assume that at a minimum admissions policies for displaced students would be evident. Formalized pathways—evidenced by tailored outreach and/or admissions and financial aid programs—are not in operation. This lack of support for displaced learners indicates a clear systemic failure, and one which cannot be separated from an entrenched history of racialization and exclusion experienced by migrant learners in the US setting.

Working from an understanding of education as social contract and as a human right, we point to language and infrastructure as key considerations for Ohio-based policy actors moving forward. By infrastructure we refer to funding, participatory strategies, accessible information for a specific equity group, and so forth. By language we refer to the need for a glossary, a nomenclature to refer to the diverse grouping of displaced learners accessing and pursuing higher education in the US; we refer to a consideration of essentialism and power imbalance across all university functions; consistent attention to and naming of public disinvestment in education; and linguistic competencies. The research discussed here extends an understanding of the current and ever-expanding landscape of displaced learners’ access to higher education. It considers student mobility within Ohio in, perhaps, a new way. Most importantly, it calls for change.

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Ten Pillars of Neoliberal Fascist Education

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Those convictions and motives, upon which the Nazi regime drew, no longer belong to a past that one can count by the intervening years: they have returned...to the democratic everyday. —Jürgen Habermas: Germany's Second Chance

Few would disagree that public education in the United States—the kind that Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, and John Dewey imagined would support the emotional and intellectual “production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality”—is under siege. The current attack on public education, unlike other assaults over the past several decades, is notable for its support from SCOTUS, its determined base of grassroots ideologues, and its commitment to constructing a completely new system of schooling in the United States. Animated most visibly by censorious attacks on free speech, the individuals and political organizations laying siege to public education aspire to no less than a razing of the educational system first imagined by Jefferson, outlined in detail by Mann, and theorized and practiced by Dewey. Breaking clean from Jefferson, Mann and Dewey, those leading the assault, unlike the architects of the other

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21st century educational reform movements (*No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*), are explicitly and unapologetically anti-democratic. Their post-democratic, authoritarian vision for schooling in the United States represents, according to educational philosopher and cultural critic, Henry Giroux, a nascent form of neoliberal fascist ideology:

Neoliberalism's hatred of democracy, the common good, and the social contract has unleashed generic elements of a fascist past in which white supremacy, ultra-nationalism, rabid misogyny and immigrant fervor come together in a toxic mix of militarism, state violence, and a politics of disposability. Modes of fascist expression adapt variously to different political historical contexts assuring racial apartheid-like forms in the post-bellum U.S. and overt encampments and extermination in Nazi Germany. Fascism with its unquestioning belief in obedience to a powerful strongman, violence as a form of political purification, hatred as an act of patriotism, racial and ethnic cleansing, and the superiority of a select ethnic or national group has resurfaced in the United States. In this mix of economic barbarism, political nihilism, racial purity, economic orthodoxy, and ethical somnambulism a distinctive economic-political formation has been produced that I term neoliberal fascism.

Within this discourse, democracy, and by association, democratic education are seen as hindrances to the kind of political and cultural system they are trying to create within the United States.

In what follows, I will discuss how the current assault on public education is shaped by several of the major principles of contemporary fascist politics identified and outlined by Brad Evans and Henry Giroux in their recent essay, "American Fascism: Fourteen Deadly Principles of Contemporary Politics." From their work, I've identified and outlined what I call the Ten Pillars of Neoliberal Fascist Schooling that are in various stages of development in the United States. Some are in the earliest stages, barely audible whispers at the margins of an evolving radical discourse. Some have already taken root and are shaping what children are learning and teachers are teaching in schools today. Evans and Giroux's essay, although not taken whole cloth, is a concept map—it is a cartographic tool for measuring the work and progress of those people and political organizations who are attempting to raze the US system of taxpayer-supported public education, while erecting a radically different system of schooling on the ten pillars I discuss.

Just as Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey understood the synergetic relationship between public education and a functioning and sustainable democracy, the organized forces of neoliberal fascism in the United States also understand how important it is to have a formal system of mass schooling that will support their ideological agenda. Rather

than “produce free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality,” the neoliberal fascist school will function as a national, unified system of “repressive desublimation” which will produce docile bodies/minds and un-free human beings pitted against one another on terms of opportunity and competition. Unlike Jefferson, whose central argument for public education rested on the truism that citizens cannot be, at the same time, ignorant and free, neoliberal fascists imagine a school system that manufactures a kind of willful ignorance in the name of freedom.

The first pillar of the neoliberal fascist school is its appeal to individual desire and fear, what Evans and Giroux call the “Grammar of Fascism.” Drawing on the work of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, they argue that indexes of desire and fear within neoliberal fascism suggest a pedagogical relationship between citizens and leadership that is built on the promise of security and freedom. Its grammar helps create a veil of deception; it doesn’t just say “no,” as Foucault also has argued, but instead presents an illusion of freedom, what Erich Fromm called “negative freedom,” which organizes people’s desire for freedom along the lines of escape. Within this grammar, certain “differences” (skin color, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, gendered identities) are demonized, criminalized, and/or policed; political power is concentrated within the central office; and war, conflict, and competition are the lessons students will learn about the “hegemony of peace.”

This pillar of neoliberal fascist schooling reflects the human desire and need for safety and security, while simultaneously exacerbating fear and anxiety. Within the grammar of neoliberal fascism, as Evans and Giroux explain, the promise of freedom can be realized only when the individual “voluntarily” rejects her relation to the social, replacing it with tribal associations, which are themselves presumed subservient to the individual. It follows then that schools must work to teach students to denounce and deny their political agency in the name of security and they must do this voluntarily, i.e., as a reflex of common sense.

The second pillar of the neoliberal fascist school system articulates with the principle of fascism that Evans and Giroux call the “Normalization of the Emergency.” Against the democratic impulse of Jefferson and Mann, but particularly Dewey, who saw a personal crisis as an opportunity for learning how to problem-solve collectively and democratically, “neoliberal fascists glom onto economic and political chaos—whether they create it or not—to rewrite the crisis as ‘a fascist condition of possibility.’”

This notion of possibility turns the promise of democratic education on its head. Within this new system of schooling, problems are

blamed via representations in standardized curricula on the actions or existence of “the other,” while solutions come exclusively from the central offices of official power. Students are then taught to trust and depend on the authority of individuals in positions of power to solve whatever crisis is disrupting the promise of peace and security.

The third pillar articulates with the political principle that Evans and Giroux identify as the “Liberation of Prejudice.” They write, “the active liberation and the effective mobilizations of prejudicial desires” release the political imagination from the principled constraints of democracy. Within the neoliberal fascist educational imaginary, forms of real and symbolic violence against vulnerable and minority communities are represented as necessary evils in the fight for peace and security. Blaming the victims of predatory capitalism for their own victimization, for example, becomes a pedagogical response to poverty.

Compassion, empathy, and shared responsibility for the suffering of others in our diverse communities, essential markers of a democratic education, are replaced by the criminalization of suffering and the policing of difference. Liberating prejudice, according to Evans and Giroux, also has the effect of pitting vulnerable populations against each other. While students of the ruling classes reap the educational benefits of neoliberal capitalism in the form of private schools and segregated neighborhoods, the general population of students is taught to mistrust those who are also struggling under similar conditions and even blame them, in whole or in part, for their own precarious circumstances.

In curricular and pedagogical terms, Social Darwinism will play a central role in these neoliberal fascist schools. Everyone, regardless of their place on the grid of power, will be encouraged to see themselves as potential victims of violence and injustice; “scapegoating” is rationalized as a way to protect oneself or tribe against an attack. “In order for such scapegoating to become a central aspect of [educational] discussions and awareness,” Evans and Giroux argue, “[schooling] must be reduced to questions of survival.”

All schooling—democratic or neoliberal fascist—interprets a past and imagines a future. Democratic education as imagined by Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey, requires students to learn—along with the triumphs and accomplishments—the complicated, troubling, and sometimes painful events of our past. The future depends on learning about the nation’s history in a way that prevents students from repeating the mistakes and missteps of those who came before them, but also teaches them to emulate the attitudes and behaviors of our most enlightened and courageous leaders. Democratic education requires, as Giroux explains, both a “language of critique and a language of possibility.” Na-

tional mythologies about a mythic past have no place in schools that are preparing citizens for direct participation in a democracy, but they do cohere with the assumptions of neoliberal fascist schooling.

Neoliberal fascism's "naked appeal to mythical violence," the fourth pillar and political principle in Evans and Giroux's political map, suggests how neoliberal fascist schools will teach students to have "a certain nostalgia for a mythical and glorious Paradise Lost." Yet unlike 20th century versions of fascism, today's neoliberal version is "now re-narrated as a system of preservation." Today's neoliberal fascists demand the preservation of the "Anglosphere" which they imagine to be under siege from the invasion of the other. Borders, walls, policing, domestic militarization, invasion, sanctioned police violence, and the right to assault weapons and other military tools of containment and surveillance are all part of the grammar of preservation. Schools become vital sites for the normalization of these concerns through pedagogies of cultural literacy and the alignment of curricula and assessments to this grammar.

Cultural literacy within the neoliberal fascist educational imagination "harnesses the emotions of nostalgia, a yearning for a past that was pure, marked by a robust nationalism, and literally cleansed of its dark moments." Historical amnesia is more about erasing than forgetting; it refers to a pedagogical process that frames the past in a way that flips the sociological imagination on its head. Public issues, social struggle, collectivist-driven change are reduced to stories about individual people doing remarkable things. Our collective history, with all its painful and triumphant moments, is rewritten, as James Loewen describes it, as "heroification." Presenting little more than historical caricatures of the real people who played important roles throughout history, this process of heroification not only erases the "dark moments" of history from the official record, but it also affects people's ability to think critically about the present and engage the social imagination. Within neoliberal fascist schools, mythology replaces history, provoking students to yearn for a past that never was and denying them the critical tools of perspective consciousness and sociological analysis.

Twenty-first century North American neoliberal fascism, write Evans and Giroux, "shows a willful disregard for human life. It has thrown millions into the abyss of human misery and despair." The notion of acceptable disposability—the fifth pillar of neoliberal fascist schooling—teaches students to compete for scarce and/or diminishing resources while manufacturing ignorance about how and why these resources might be scarce and diminishing. For example, we know that some of this scarcity is manufactured, such as when agri-business de-

stroys grains and other food products and/or obliterates the local production of food to increase shareholder profits. Diminishing resources like clean water is in large part a result of unregulated industrial pollution and privatization. Privatization within modernity, according to eminent sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, leaves people vulnerable to being labeled redundant; indeed, redundancy is a sign of progress within neoliberal fascist ideology. "People for whom there is no good room in society," Bauman writes, "should be either separated from the rest and put somewhere in an enclosure, or completely disposed of—very often, particularly in our times, just left to their own initiative what to do with themselves."

As a pillar of neoliberal fascist schooling, the hegemony of disposability no longer hides, as it did within the discourse of neoliberal democracy, within the official curricula of history, social science, and literature education. As a pillar of neoliberal fascist education, acceptable disposability turns public issues into private concerns. Poverty, food insecurity, and joblessness are represented within the curricula as arising either from the subaltern's own deficiencies or from the encroachment of the subaltern onto territory assigned through manifest destiny. The first option suggests the need for rigorous policing and containment of subaltern communities while the second demands a more aggressive, militaristic intervention. Reframing the refugee crisis at the Southern border as an invasion, as some within the nascent neoliberal fascist wing of the GOP have begun to do, reflects both the concept of acceptable disposability and the militaristic response that it engenders.

Barred windows, metal detectors, armed teachers, and a heavy police presence signal the introduction of "the militarization of educational life," the sixth pillar. Within the fascist imaginary, militarization is a sign of safety, security, and strength. Many people within these communities welcome such a presence even though it naturally limits their freedoms. Violence and the threat of violence in schools suggests the need for protection. "A defining feature of fascism," Evans and Giroux write, "is to wage war upon its own population, to enact a civil war where the lines of battle take place at every door, down every street, through every conversation, in every possible setting."

From schools to shopping areas across the country, community policing is replaced by militarization; armored vehicles, military grade weapons and surveillance technologies, coupled with "hidden" security forces, signal a shift in how safety and security are being defined within the logic of neoliberal fascism. Militarization of the everyday is not seen as a threat to autonomy but welcomed as protection against the violence perpetuated by "the other." In many public schools in the

United States, surveillance is ubiquitous and accepted as the price of safety and security.

The militarization of school life does not require actual military force to be used against students and teachers. This would in fact work against the interests of established neoliberal fascist power. See Kent State for a 20th century example of the consequences of what can happen when militarization moves beyond representation and engages in acts of violence against students in schools. Instead, militarization, within the neoliberal fascist educational imagination, reframes the fundamental relationship between students and teachers and between the school and society. Within the school culture of neoliberal fascism, there is no contradiction between freedom and militarization; the former depends upon the latter. Importantly, students, teachers, and parents must voluntarily accept the militarization of their schools and communities, i.e., it must become hegemonic or risk stirring resistance in both students and teachers. Through thousands of hours of instruction, beginning in kindergarten (or earlier), students and teachers learn to read the militarization of their schools and neighborhoods as a precondition of their political freedom.

The seventh pillar of a neoliberal fascist education rests on Theodore Adorno's seminal study of leadership within fascist ideologies, "The Authoritarian Personality." Adorno showed how fascism depends on a form of pedagogical leadership that hides its autocratic desires and aspirations behind the veil of a harmless clown. As history has shown, these clownish leaders are anything but harmless and their desire for power is ruthless and violent. Yet, to their followers they are entertaining, brave, smart, and funny. Always the victim (or potential victim) of hidden, dark forces, the authoritarian personality appeals to those people who perceive their struggles within the democratic system as part of a larger conspiracy to keep people like them (i.e., race, class, gender, religion, culture, language) from the centers of official power and privilege. Within the schools, the idea of the authoritarian personality gets registered across the official curriculum, through pedagogies that reinforce hierarchies of oppression, and the autocratic administration of the school itself.

In curricular terms, the authoritarian personality is celebrated in the books, films, articles, and art the students will be expected to learn. The individual is the primary subject of analysis in neoliberal fascist curricula. Power is centralized and students will be taught to "look up" for solutions and "look around" for blame. This is the opposite of what a democratic education would teach; that is, a democratic education teaches students to "look around" for solutions and "look up" for the potential source of the problem.

At the pedagogical level, teachers and students mirror the authoritarian personality within the classroom. This means that students learn to think about the relationship between knowledge and power in a way in which the latter legitimates the former. The authoritarian personality within the school context inverts the idiom that knowledge is power. Power unapologetically determines what counts as knowledge. As such, teachers are the center of power, deploy a system of reward and punishment that maintains order in the classroom and school, and are the ones who know. To question the authoritarian teacher is perceived as a challenge to her authority specifically, but more importantly, it represents a threat to the status quo of power. The environment of learning within these spaces is defined by the teacher while the students are seen as objects to be trained. Training rather than education articulates with the authoritarian personality. Students are trained not only for jobs but also to follow. If a democratic education teaches students to lead as opposed to being led, the authoritarian personality trains students and teachers to respect and trust the authority of their sanctioned leaders to know what is best.

Administratively, the institution is hierarchical and overtly serves the interests of official power outside of the school. Charismatic yet ruthlessly rigid and anti-collectivist, the authoritarian leadership in the neoliberal fascist school makes sure that teachers and students follow the dictates of power. Surveillance of content as well as behavior and speech is a vital lever of ideological coherence and control.

The eighth pillar demands the regular production of the “Spectacle.” Spectacles are cultural events within the school that involve students, teachers, and families and celebrate the superiority of the neoliberal fascist system and its established leaders. The spectacle is a vital component of the neoliberal fascist school experience. They are multi-sensory experiences that demand allegiance to both the school as well as the social and political systems of which it is a part. The spectacle is always a form of politicized entertainment. “Pep” and political rallies, music concerts, and sporting events are four common spectacles that create a sense of belonging and community but not on an ethos of love and empathy. Love within the spectacle of fascism is, as Evans and Giroux argue, artificial; it makes a spectacle out of love by turning hatred of “the other” into a form of entertainment. But maybe even more insidious is the spectacle’s ability to create community and a sense of deep belonging through the production of symbolic associations. Uniforms, mascots, flags, and shared songs provide the semiotic support that the spectacle needs to broaden and deepen its appeal to its members.

The ninth pillar of the neoliberal fascist school aligns with the ideology of white supremacy. The curricular and pedagogical implications of such an alignment results in the censoring of all content and the state regulation of pedagogies that would bring attention to the systemic and institutional realities of racism in the United States. The nascent development of this pillar is already beginning to take root in some of the nation's schools. Heather McGee writes, "According to PEN America, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting free expression, legislatures in 36 states have proposed 137 bills that would limit teaching about race, gender and American history. Nineteen censorship bills have become law in the past two years." The move away from Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey suggests a complete rejection of public education's historical and ideological relationship to constitutional democracy. The centralization of white supremacist ideology within neoliberal fascist schools if/when completed would represent a return to a time when white Christians in the United States violently wielded their official power (governmental, economic, cultural) without apology.

The tenth and last pillar of neoliberal fascist schooling is the Privatization Reflex. All things public—parks, schools, transportation, housing, media—are associated with socialism and inefficiency. At the governmental level, this reflex translates into the desire for a small but powerful government whose legitimacy comes in large part from the support it receives from the judiciary and economic elite. Unlike 20th century autocratic systems that relied on a committed military, 21st century neoliberal fascism relies in large part on the juridical and legislative spheres, both influenced and shaped by the economic power of a shrinking number of individuals and shareholders. This allows for concentrated power to legally dismantle institutional protections against anti-democratic forces. The privatization reflex also places enormous power in the hands of business while taking it out of the hands of the people. Once a small but powerful private group of stakeholders, largely unaccountable to the masses of people who may disagree with their interests and beliefs, takes over government, how schools function and for what purposes narrow to reflect those private concerns. The move over the past ten years to normalize voucher and charter schools, while desensitizing the public to the complementary issues of economic and racial segregation, has resulted in a form of public education that looks less like an experiment in democratic preparation and more like a system of social and economic reproduction. The privatization reflex essentially turns what C. Wright Mills described as the sociological imagination on its head. This inversion hollows out the promise of democratic education. What appeared pos-

sible in terms of democratic life and the education that could support such a system of self-governance now seems improbable. The crisis and chaos of imagination that ensues opens the door for a system radically different than the one Jefferson, Mann, or Dewey desired. It is not, however, a system that they could not foresee. Their relentless pursuit of mass, public education funded through taxation was driven in large part by the fear that democracy would fail without it.

These ten pillars of neoliberal fascist education, to varying degrees throughout the United States, are taking root. Attacks on Critical Race Theory, LGBTQ+ curriculum, tenure/academic freedom, and public education itself are direct challenges to the kind democratic education Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey imagined would be necessary for the viability of democracy in the United States. The weakening of democratic institutions in the United States and throughout the world is well-documented. As the authors of Freedom House succinctly report, “Democracy is in retreat.” What is also true is that as democracy retreats so does democratic education. As democratic education loses legitimacy, democracy’s hegemony weakens.

It’s true that the kind of democratic education that Jefferson, Mann, and Dewey envisioned has been in retreat for quite some time. And there is a good argument to be made that the weakening of democracy in the United States today can, at least in part, be mapped to the decline of democratic education within our public schools over the past twenty-five years. But we seem to be on the cusp of something bigger than we have ever seen in the United States regarding the state of public education and its implicit connection to democratic ideology. The belief that what we are seeing within government and schools is just another type of reform movement ignores how radically distinct these efforts are from the educational reform movements of the past. These ten pillars of neoliberal fascist education suggest a complete severing of public education from democratic life and a suturing of schooling to neoliberal fascist ideology. Although it’s impossible to say with certainty what our schools will look like under the regime of neoliberal fascism, or if neoliberal fascism will continue to dismantle constitutional democracy in the United States and elsewhere, these pillars provide a glimpse into what, even twenty years ago, seemed impossible with regards to the future of public education in the United States.

Notes

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