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Video Essay

The Academy Talks with Francisco Ramirez
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** Our thanks to the cadre of scholars who serve as reviewers without whose services the journal could not exist.
Colleagues and Friends of the Academy:

Before getting to the “why” and the “what” of this second annual special issue of CQIE, we want to provide an update on the numerous goings on in the Academy—it has certainly been a busy few months on that count. As you may or may not know, the Academy has gone through some serious growing pains of late, and much like an adolescent growing toward adulthood, these growing pains have pushed us “out of the nest” so to speak. It is with some bitter sweetness that we inform you that The Academy for Educational Studies is now an independent, national, non-profit organization.

The bitter part (maybe a bit of an overstatement) comes with our departure from the nest. Missouri State University has supported us in very crucial ways as we have moved to and through our adolescent stage of development. Of particular importance has been the support provided by our Dean, David Hough, who was in large part responsible for the Academy’s birth a decade ago and continues to lend his support as we move toward independence. We will certainly never forget our Missouri State University roots.

The sweetness comes with the Academy’s expanded potential. That potential can already be seen in our decision to host two annual national conferences. We very recently held our regular October meeting at the beautiful Brown Hotel in Louisville Kentucky and are very much looking forward to our next one in San Diego this coming February. For the San Diego get together we are excited to have Gary Orfield, Professor of Education at UCLA and co-Director of the Civil Rights Project and Francisco Ramirez, Professor of Comparative Education at Stanford University joining us for two Academy Talk sessions. We look forward to seeing everyone in sunny San Diego. Information about the San Diego conference can be found at our web site: academyforeducationalstudies.org. The Academy is also looking to expand its publishing presence—more on that as we work out the details—suffice it to say that we are very excited about future publishing possibilities.

And, so, why a special issue on homeless youth and schools? Quite simply, the responsibilities that educators, administrators, and school districts have in regard to the education of our most vulnerable youth has for too long gone ignored. For those of us who prepare teachers, we too may feel culpable after reading this special issue given the lack of attention our homeless youth have received in teacher education coursework. The fact of the matter is that we, all of us, have important responsibilities—including legal responsibilities—to ensure that our homeless youth receive the education to which they are entitled. The articles in this collection speak to those responsibilities and the students who deserve our attention, care, and active response. Enjoy…thoughtfully.

PAX,

Eric C. Sheffield, Founding Editor  Jessica A. Heybach, Associate Editor
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School Norms and Reforms, Critical Race Theory, and the Fairytale of Equitable Education

Amy Rector-Aranda, University of Cincinnati

Abstract

In this paper, I utilize three tenets of Critical Race Theory in education—racism is normal, whiteness as property, and interest convergence—to illuminate the overt and covert ways racial inequity is preserved in the contemporary climate of public schooling and corporatized education reform efforts, as well as the particularly troubling situation wherein communities of color have repeatedly been promised educational improvement and enrichment, but have rarely received it. I then attempt to connect what is with what might be, using Derrick Bell’s theory of racial realism as a tool for understanding the very potent reality of this situation and how students, parents, educators, communities, activists and scholars can and do confront this reality as a form of empowerment in itself, and as such, can enact change.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, white privilege, urban education, culturally relevant curriculum, corporate school reform, school climate, student diversity

Introduction

The U.S. public preK–12 education system has in recent decades experienced monumental developments, particularly since the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report “A Nation at Risk” in 1983, more recently through federal initiatives like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, and by efforts at uniformity like the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Reform efforts have been increasingly rooted in free-market models of individualism and high-stakes competition, but also represent the corporatization of schooling in general, exemplified in how education has become a fruitful investment for many business interests, from publishers and testing companies to entrepreneurs running for-profit charter organizations.¹ Equitable education has been professed as a top priority in these reforms, however, the problem instead appears to be worsening.² Despite highly questionable outcomes, even when

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² Wayne Au, Unequal by Design: High-Stakes Testing and the Standardization of Inequality (New York: Routledge, 2009); Sigal Ben-Porath, "Deferring Virtue: The New Management of Students and the Civic Role of
gauged by the reformers’ own standards of measurable achievement or economic and organizational efficiency, these kinds of reforms have not only continued to flourish, but have gained a kind of political power that seems difficult to dethrone. While many critical scholars have tended to attribute all this to classism in a capitalist, neoliberal milieu, others would posit that there is much more to the story considering that the lowest socioeconomic classes are perpetually communities of color. Key tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be employed here in order to expose how the chances that these policies would ever increase racial equity were not only improbable, but fantastical from the start.

In this paper, I will utilize three tenets of CRT in education—racism is normal, whiteness as property, and interest convergence—to illuminate the contemporary climate of public schooling, corporatized education reform efforts, and particularly, the situation previously described wherein communities of color have been promised educational improvement and enrichment, but have rarely received it. I will then attempt to connect what is with what might be, using Derrick Bell’s theory of racial realism as a tool for understanding the very potent reality of this situation and how students, parents, educators, communities, activists and scholars can and do confront this reality as a form of empowerment in itself, and as such, can enact change.

This is Not a Post-Racial World

Indeed, the very absence of visible signs of discrimination creates an atmosphere of racial neutrality which encourages whites to believe that racism is a thing of the past.

The key principles of CRT frame a perspective on white dominance and race relations that rejects the usual discourses of objectivity, neutrality, color-blindness, meritocracy, and equality under law. CRT scholars infer that white privilege requires this language for its maintenance and go as far as to renovate the term “white supremacy” to encompass the cultural, psychic and physical systems that not only ensure white privilege, but nearly effortlessly perpetuate it. In CRT, race and whiteness, albeit very authentically experienced, are socially constructed and highly fluctuating ways people are identified and accordingly treated. It is important to clarify here that CRT’s aim is to attack this construction of race that privileges surface whiteness, not individual people.
who might identify with a race. Similarly, CRT advocates for the disenfranchised who have not been seen as unique individuals due to these constructions of race.  

Perhaps the most basic belief among CRT theorists is that *racism is normal*. It is ordinary and pervasive in our daily lives, not aberrational—embedded in our cultural consciousness and institutions in such a way as to make its effects seem reasonable and innocuous.  

Racism is generally a “dysconscious” act—it is “an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given.” Today’s racism is not only constituted by the occasional offenses of bigots and extremists, it is also embodied in everyday practices and behaviors that have situated and maintained white supremacy for hundreds of years so as to make it invisible and instinctive, even to the largely well-meaning general population who inadvertently (re)enforce it.

**From Discipline to Curriculum, and All the White Matter in Between**

Because education is foundational to culture, it is crucial that educators recognize how the things that happen in schools affect the outcomes and practices of other public institutions and the larger society. Education has substantial power to either challenge or to perpetuate societal injustices, the effects of which influence the schools again in a repeating cycle. In order to see the racially defined flaws of current educational norms and reform efforts, it is first necessary to demonstrate and accept that racism is still very real, common, and particularly endemic in education.

Despite a richly diverse population who hold some things in common but nonetheless have independent and varied knowledges, histories, customs, values, and gifts to share, only Western Euro-centric versions are equated with purity, correctness and superiority in our racialized society, and this is reified early on in schools. For example, “intelligence” theorists and IQ testing architects were also eugenicists who believed whites were genetically superior to other races; and they designed these tests—the predecessors of today’s achievement tests, college entrance exams, and

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8. CRT is a merging of a few overarching tenets blended with individual theories relative to specific races and contexts, the descriptions of which would take more space than I can dedicate here. For more comprehensive discussions of CRT, see: Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., ed., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Form the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Marvin Lynn and Adrienne D. Dixson, eds., *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (New York: Routledge, 2013).


other standardized tests used to rank and sort students, effectively determining their futures—according to white, dominant norms and using only white students to measure their validity.\textsuperscript{11} These patterns still permeate today’s tests, which “allow classroom practices and identities to be regulated from a distance.”\textsuperscript{12}

Such regulation translates into other discriminatory practices that should seem more transparent, especially in light of the recent publicized killings and other atrocities by white police officers against unarmed suspects of color. Procedures, language, and related prison metaphors dominate the daily lives of students in many urban schools, where “their bodies, minds, and spirits have already been chained in the prison that is the mainstream public education system.”\textsuperscript{13} One example is profiling that disproportionately disciplines minority youth, embodied in supposedly neutral (and proven ineffective) zero tolerance policies that are in reality quite racially biased and open to interpretation by school officials (who are usually white). There are even policies in particular locales that directly link schools with the juvenile corrections system.\textsuperscript{14} The statistics that clearly support the school-to-prison pipeline theory, however, can surely never account for the multiple influences that affect minority students’ behavior in schools. One of these influences is an observable disconnect between alleged educational ideals and students’ actual lived experiences of alienation and cultural irrelevance.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, the predominant explanations attribute the phenomenon to personal responsibility, wherein the flaw lies completely with the individual student rather than the larger oppressive social and institutional systems.\textsuperscript{16} McGrew studied incarcerated youths’ relationship to schooling in a less urban setting, and was still able to illustrate the increasing connection between schooling and the privatized and profitable prison industrial complex.\textsuperscript{17}

It is telling that in a school system that has more resources than most, and a general commitment to discuss and accommodate diversity, that we find unusually high rates of special-education referral, disciplinary actions, suspensions, expulsions, dropouts, arrest and incarceration for students of color.\textsuperscript{18}

Placing blame on students for failure to meet the standards set for them excuses the larger system from any accountability for failing those students. This same focus on individual responsibility is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Paul E. Green, "Separate and Still Unequal: Legal Challenges to School Tracking and Ability Grouping in America’s Public Schools," in \textit{Race is...Race Isn't: Critical Race Theory & Qualitative Studies in Education}, eds. Laurence Parker, Donna Deyhle and Sofia Villenas (Westview Press, 1999), 231–50;
\item \textsuperscript{12} Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Through a Glass Darkly: The Persistence of Race in Education Research & Scholarship," \textit{Educational Researcher} 41, no. 4 (2012), 115–20;
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ken McGrew, \textit{Education’s Prisoners: Schooling, the Political Economy, and the Prison Industrial Complex} (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 20.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Andrew N. McKnight, "'They Never Really Tried to Reach Out to Us': Examining Identities and Confronting the Emotional Distance between Urban Youth and Urban Schools," \textit{Critical Questions in Education} 6, no. 2 (2015), 86-102.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Douglas Horsford and Grosland, "Badges of Inferiority."
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 20.
\end{itemize}
repeated for explaining other racial disparities in the general population, rather than questioning the outside and imposed forces that may have contributed.¹⁹

White supremacy is more easily concealed in curricula that uncritically favors a single and standardized, watered-down, hegemonic, white narrative.²⁰ While the curriculum-narrowing effects of current reform policy are well-observed and contested,²¹ the ways in which this curriculum also portrays or excludes race in the conversation serves the further purpose of downplaying the importance of race in our history, and thus our present day.²²

A society founded on genocide, built on the labor of African slaves, developed by Latino serfs and Asian indentured servants, made fabulously wealthy through exploitation and masterful manipulation and mystification—a society like this is a society built on race.²³

To deny the importance of race in our curricular content is to deny reality. Yet, overwhelmingly, even in classes like history and social studies, teachers are conveying race in ways that are counterproductive under a blind devotion to neutrality,²⁴ and can even be hostile toward more accurate portrayals.²⁵

When it comes to official history, there is no paucity of representation of whites as its creator…However, when it concerns domination, whites suddenly disappear…Their previous omnipresence becomes a position of nowhere, a certain politics of undetectability.²⁶

It is of particular interest to this discussion that students are actually taught about racial injustices that occur elsewhere. Students learn about the Holocaust in Nazi Germany (where the victims were also, notably, fair-skinned), or darker-skinned foreigners who attack purportedly blameless Western nations or each other. They rarely hear critical stories about racial injustices within our own borders, such as the Tulsa Riots or the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, or violent Indian removal
and the effects of Manifest Destiny on Mexican and other native inhabitants of the West.\textsuperscript{27} We do not admit to students that many of our most revered leaders were racial extremists we would essentially deem terrorists by today’s standards.\textsuperscript{28} Dominant ideologies attempt to condemn this brand of honesty by calling it “racist propaganda” that subverts devotion to glorified notions of color-blindness, oneness and patriotism, but because these are all defined according to dominant white standards and as ways of protecting white values, they effectively put “the interests, fears, and feelings of white people at the centre of policy.”\textsuperscript{29}

Besides depriving students of a broader understanding of the world in which they must actually live, this further debilitates students of color, allocating their racial identities to the dustbin of human awareness, and requiring them to either consciously or unconsciously deny their histories, cultures and lived experiences of racism in order to get by in schools.\textsuperscript{30} This “double-consciousness,” as named by W.E.B. DuBois, receives neither recognition nor compassion in a falsely color-blind curriculum. In his oft-quoted passage, DuBois grieves:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.\textsuperscript{31}

McKnight and Chandler use Pierre Bourdieu’s constructs to illuminate how this constitutes “symbolic violence” against students of color, forcing them to bow to arbitrary notions of what is educationally worthwhile. Color-blind content is usually accompanied by pedagogic actions that preserve the status quo by simultaneously denying students the capacity to critically engage with these concepts.\textsuperscript{32} When ability tracking (based on narrow measurements of what is considered “ability”) disproportionately relegates these students to a low-track curriculum that is based in order and discipline rather than analytical thinking and creativity, this amounts to school-sponsored silencing and disempowerment.\textsuperscript{33} As modes of social reproduction that play favorites with race, entrenched, normalized racism and white supremacy have always been and continue to be insidious roadblocks to educational equity.


\textsuperscript{32} McKnight and Chandler, “The Complicated Conversation.”

The “World Making Power” of Whiteness

McKnight and Chandler also use Bourdieu to interpret the relationships between race and class, specifically noting the construct of cultural “capital,” which “represents those items or ways of thinking in society valued by the dominant groups in society and officially sanctioned by those in positions of power”—and whiteness is the ultimate cultural capital. Donnor asserts that “through force, coercion, consent, custom, and jurisprudential edifice, white skin and whiteness have become exclusive forms of private property” making whiteness a “racialized system of meaning and domination composed of ideological adherents and material components.” In Harris’s original theory of whiteness as property, all the social, economic, political and legal advantages, benefits, and assumptions that protect and perpetuate the power of whiteness are equated and entwined with the same types of rights to and derived from tangible property ownership. Without reiterating them all here, Harris explains the multiple ways, both seen and implicit, that whiteness has afforded and continues to afford certain allowances, and the difficulty in unseating these norms.

Ladson-Billings and Tate draw our attention to Harris’s functions of whiteness as property that are relevant in discussions of education, the first of which are rights of disposition, meaning property can be transferred from one owner to another. When students of color are rewarded (or sometimes chastised) for conformity to white norms and standards, whiteness becomes an alienable property. This can specifically be seen in what is often referred to as students “acting white,” or in depictions of Asian Americans as “model minorities,” because they adhere to an array of characteristics endorsed by white society and attributed to whiteness. One example is the meritocratic mandate of individually overcoming limitations and pulling oneself up by one’s “bootstraps,” which dismisses unsuccessful reforms and instead blames individual students, teachers and schools for their failures. High academic ability and achievement, particularly measurable achievement such as high test scores, or meeting college entrance criteria, is another characteristic attributed to whiteness. Quietness, orderliness and courteousness are the types of behavior especially valued in educational settings, and even radically enforced in the “totalizing environments” of some privatized charter schools in minority communities. Furthermore, the approved academic setting emphasizes rationality and rejects emotion, which aligns with claims of supposed objectivity that plague educational research and reform in general. Such an emphasis denies the reality that our humanity is enhanced by both capacities in different ways, and faults those who dare to exercise feeling alongside their thinking. Besides presupposing that these kinds of traits are the property of whites to begin with, and that “others” are not independently capable of possessing these traits, their opposites—which are often tied to minority attainment, behavior and culture—are then considered unsavory, inferior and undesirable by default.

35. “Education as the Property of Whites,” 199.
37. Ladson-Billings and Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education."
38. Subedi, "The Racialization of South Asian Americans."
40. Ben-Porath, "Deferring Virtue."
41. Ladson-Billings, "Through a Glass Darkly;" Subedi, "The Racialization of South Asian Americans."
Rights to use and enjoyment define whiteness as property in that taking advantage of the freedoms and privileges of whiteness renders these properties used and enjoyed by whites. In the case of schooling, whiteness as property tends to ensure whites rights of use and enjoyment of all-around better schools, materially and curricularly. Historically, physical property was only ownable by whites, guaranteeing a legacy of unfairly distributed assets that has yet to be remedied, and thus limited recourse for students of color today when schools are funded by property taxes and they largely reside in low-income neighborhoods with low property values. Traditionally, “white flight” from urban areas to more racially homogenized suburban communities has been the standard measure of whiteness as enjoyable property. White families have been more able, through their resources of whiteness, to escape struggling, racially mixed neighborhood schools in favor of those in better neighborhoods with better funding and support systems—although, as Delgado and Stefancic note, they don’t realize that such a move away from diversity actually tends to diminish educational quality. On the flip side, Stovall outlines the housing and educational reform movement in Chicago Public Schools wherein marginalized communities were promised improved educational opportunities, but neighborhoods were gentrified and families were actually displaced, effectively “sanitiz[ing] the community” for whites and otherwise privileged classes to move in. Such urban renewal is on the rise in many cities, where investors snatch up cheap, distressed buildings to renovate, entrepreneurs open businesses that cater to more affluent patrons, property values skyrocket, and low-income families can no longer afford to live there.

Reputation and status are also treated as property that can either be improved, as when climbing the ladder of success, or damaged, as in legal notions of libel and slander. While some may rightfully protest that not all whites enjoy the same level of whiteness privileges, one thing all whites still possess is their status as white wherein even poor whites retain benefits of whiteness that come with membership in a society based in white supremacy, which their minority counterparts will never have. In schools particularly, nonwhite forms of learning are considered of lower status than white forms, such as the necessity for bilingual education having a lower reputation than a native English speaker learning a second language by choice. Similarly, “urban” is generally a positive term when describing white sophistication, but becomes negative when used to describe urban schools identified with students of color, or in how suburban schools lose status when urban students are bused in. In the context of today’s reforms, the business of schooling has literally become a cutthroat competition for the kinds of achievement reputation and status that ensure schools, districts and states more resources under initiatives like NCLB and RTT. At the same time, these boost neighborhood desirability which in turn affects real estate values, which then in turn contribute back to the quality of those schools because higher property values mean higher taxes and more funding—all things that benefit whites more than minorities since it is largely they who already possess these benefits of whiteness, as previously described. Because minorities lack sufficient cultural and material capital and resources to begin with, their schools are already low

42. Harris, "Whiteness as Property."
45. Harris, "Whiteness as Property;" Ladson-Billings and Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education."
in reputation and desirability, and consequently these low expectations perpetuate the low results and status that make them easy targets for white reformers.\textsuperscript{47}

The absolute right to exclude is the counterpart to possession of whiteness, for owning something means those who do not own it have no rights to its use (unless, of course, they are granted rights, as is the case with fluctuating versions of who is considered white in the first place). Harris contends that whiteness is guarded like membership to an exclusive club, wherein whiteness is what gains one admittance, and everything else is just “not white” and is excluded, further upholding white as not only a category of people, but the superior one. Denying schooling to nonwhites, and later only allowing segregated schooling, obviously excluded students of color from obtaining the same educations enjoyed by whites; today, resegregation by ability tracking,\textsuperscript{48} and insistence on options like school choice and voucher programs reinforce whiteness as a right to exclude.\textsuperscript{49} Currently, affirmative action, one of the few instances where people of color have been granted status privileges similar to whiteness as property, has come under attack with accusations of reverse racism and imposing on American ideals of individualism and capitalistic choice.

Serving as political and racial codewords, individualism and choice advance a restricted conception of equal opportunity that obfuscates entrenched ideological practices, ontological meanings, and structural arrangements that advance the self-interests and racial privileges of Whites over the educational needs of non-Whites.\textsuperscript{50}

This reasoning is supported, for example, in anti-integration Supreme Court cases like Parents Involved in Community Schools (PICS) v. Seattle School District No. 1 in 2007, where white parents won the right to exclude by reversing race-based affirmative action measures that had barely had any actual effect on school enrollment choices in the first place.\textsuperscript{51} This concretizes how systems of White supremacy will only give so much to people of color, and only when they are under pressure to do so or stand to gain something that also benefits Whites, before those advances are incrementally undermined.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{A Nation at Risk Can Be a Lucrative Investment}

Interest convergence is the concept proposed by Bell to explain why, after one hundred years of black protest regarding school segregation, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 suddenly conceded in \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}.\textsuperscript{53} According to Bell, it was a matter of what whites stood to gain by such a decision more than tending to the civil rights of black Americans. The U.S. was

\begin{itemize}
\item[49.] Ladson-Billings and Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education."
\item[50.] Donnor, "Education as the Property of Whites." 196.
\item[51.] Ibid.
\item[53.] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
in the middle of a Cold War and trying to gain third-world allies who frowned upon the inequality afforded minorities here; black WWII veterans had returned disenchanted and in protest of a nation that would allow them to fight for equality but would not grant it to them; and de-segregation would serve to help southern states increase their industrial prosperity.\textsuperscript{54} To be sure, Bell does not discount that there were plenty of well-meaning whites who supported \textit{Brown} on purely moral grounds, only that these other reasons were essential to the courts being able to appease both them and the whites who did not. He goes on to explain how the courts have since both failed to accomplish the goals of \textit{Brown} in actual school practice given that the majority of black students still attend essentially segregated and inferior schools, but also have increasingly undercut the earlier decision by upholding white privilege in ways that circumvent the de-segregation mandate, such as the \textit{PICS v. Seattle} case above.

The main tenet drawn from Bell’s idea of interest convergence is that “racial equality and equity for people of color will be pursued and advanced when they converge with the interests, needs, expectations, benefits, and ideologies of White people.”\textsuperscript{55} In this vein, school reform in the current era could be called interest convergence in several ways, while at the same time confirming the observation by Bell and others that promises are typically not fulfilled for students of color. Political reformers and entrepreneurs have capitalized on a rhetoric of disaster following examinations and comparisons of U.S. educational needs and achievement with other developed countries in the “A Nation at Risk” report. Despite a history of educational injustices for students of color, such as the whole background leading up to \textit{Brown}, reformers here expressed a swift concern for the failure of our education system to meet the needs of underprivileged students. They proceeded to organize this latest restructuring with heavy emphasis on broad curricular standardization, competition, high-stakes testing and accountability, vouchers and other school choice programs, and the privatization of educational public goods, all of which create opportunities for businesses, politicians, and philanthropists to exploit educational misfortune for their own advantage.

We have entered the age of the corporatization and businessification of education. As capital insinuates itself over the vast terrain of the globe, it is not surprising that the United States is leading the charge toward privatizing of public education. Nor is it surprising that standardized testing is being pushed, that test publishers are scrambling to boost their revenues, and that educational publishers in the testing business are experiencing economic windfalls…Today the creation and scoring of K-12 tests is a multimillion dollar industry.\textsuperscript{56}

These kinds of measures, as opposed to other ways they might have overhauled the system, particularly benefit certain interests through this kind of financial gain and changing power structures, while providing the appearance of goodwill.

As a blatant example of interest convergence, and similar to what happened in Chicago,\textsuperscript{57} in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, schools in the mostly-black recovery zones had their entire district turned over to a private educational management organization (EMO) that created its charter schools excluding input from the former community member-comprised school board.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{57} Stovall, ”Against the Politics of Desperation.”
They disregarded unionization and replaced veteran black teachers with under-educated and inexperienced, typically white teachers, and doctored test score legislation to assure the old schools would qualify for takeover and the new schools would appear to be making progress.\(^{58}\) In these reforms, “the desire to discipline communities of color through market-based policy regime controlled by white entrepreneurs is more than apparent.”\(^{59}\)

Current policies not only fail to endow suffering schools with badly needed extra resources to overcome past discrepancies, but do not even provide them equal resources, and simultaneously punish these schools when they fail to “achieve.” Because achievement is measured almost entirely by performance on standardized tests—tests whose very existence is based in white supremacist representations of intelligence and models of efficiency—white students, for whom these tests represent more relevant, native knowledge and ways of knowing, possess another advantage.

Conveniently, while school reforms are claimed to equalize and improve schooling for everyone, they have instead had a particularly negative impact on students of low socioeconomic status who consistently tend to be students of color, while simultaneously maintaining white privilege for students in better schools who have the cultural and material capital to navigate this new system. Whiteness as property has translated into practice under current education reform to mean that white students will always be ensured access to schools that are safer and have nicer facilities due to white flight, choice programs, and so on, as detailed earlier. They usually have better-qualified teachers, since poor schools get the newest teaching graduates, and charters purposely hire teachers without education degrees through alternative licensing programs, and furthermore, admit outright that they want teachers who will not teach very long because it cuts costs.\(^{60}\) Suffering schools also lack the same curricular content enjoyed in more privileged schools, partly due to resources, but also because the more a school is satisfying testing mandates, the more they can focus on non-testable subjects and material. On the contrary, failing schools must overemphasize test subjects, or “teach to the test,” to the exclusion of enrichment opportunities or content outside the purview of testing.\(^{61}\)

In essence, when policies aimed at providing “color-blind,” equitable outcomes for all students fail to enact compensatory remedies for a long history of racial inequity and injustice, and instead focus all attention on supposedly objective standards-based policies that reward a warped form of achievement and further punish failure, it is clear that uplifting the downtrodden was never really the goal. Like past token responses to racial inequity, reformers have used the current crisis as a means to endorse policies that have the appearance of justice while in practice maintain the racial status quo.

**Exposing the Racial and Fighting through Realism**

Because of the entrenchment of racism in U.S. society, critical race scholars understand that social justice with regard to the dismantling of race and racism is an unobtainable goal; yet it is worth the lifetime of struggle to fight for equity.\(^{62}\)

\(^{58}\) Buras, "Let’s be for Real;" Saltman, The Failure of Corporate School Reform.

\(^{59}\) Buras, "Let’s be for Real," 229.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.; Douglas Horsford and Grosland, "Badges of Inferiority;" Saltman, The Failure of Corporate School Reform.

\(^{61}\) Au, Unequal by Design; Saltman, The Failure of Corporate School Reform.

The aim of what Bell calls “racial realism” would be to challenge the notion of racial “equality,” instead focusing on the “real” situation that this will likely never truly exist for minorities, and turning energy toward working within this realization to accurately understand and respond to their permanent subordinate status. While not trying to discourage action toward equality, Bell hopes that this framework will enable race theorists and activists to confront pervasive oppression by removing distorted ideals in favor of realistic actions. As the examples in this article show, too many past actions and current efforts toward change unfortunately end up perpetuating the status quo via their shortsighted idealism. Racial realists recognize that racism will never go away, but must instead be seen for what it is so that confronting it becomes its own form of empowerment—we cannot eliminate racism, but we can still expose it and fight it.

Regarding racial injustice in schools, Butler’s theory of performativity can help: “Identities are something we ‘do,’ not that we are, and we can act these out, perform them, often unwittingly, in different ways in different situations.”

“A student is so, or acts as so, because she has been designated so,” and “an understanding of the subject as produced by discourse means that hegemonic meanings can be unsettled, as these discourses can potentially be interrupted.” The different ways we as students, parents, educators, leaders, scholars and other activists may be able to unsettle the racial discourse in education might include:

- Realistic classroom dialogue that allows criticality, alternative narratives and viewpoints—not only the “approved” or watered-down versions—and that presents content that is relevant to students of color, and in meaningful ways.
- Realistic teaching faculty—recruiting more teachers of color to teach students of color.
- Realistic forms of authentic assessment that emphasize growth over bleached-out forms of “achievement.”
- Realistic democracy, particularly regarding school practice and policy, which recognizes the barriers to participation and provides room for alternative voices and their modes of expression.
- Realistic forms of research that emphasize experience over objectivity. Storytelling, narrative, authentic experiences, participatory research, relational and care ethics, a social justice focus.
- Realistic policies and laws that recognize racial disparities and historical bases in inequity, and take proper compensatory measures—without backing down under pressure from those giving up privilege to make it happen.

While these ideas may seem familiar as some that have been approached incrementally in the past and failed to materialize, this undertaking must occur under a new realism that recognizes that change must be drastic, hasty, and authoritative, and thus our approach cannot be subtle. Like Rabaka, “what I am calling for here is nothing short of a critical multiculturalist, revolutionary humanist, and radical democratic socialist transgression and transcendence of Eurocentric-ideological-imperial education, socialization, and globalization.”

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63. Bell, “Racial Realism.”
65. Ibid., 51.
solidarity with communities can prove that a “politics of desperation” just might be the driving force for real change.

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Poverty, Unemployment and Homelessness: What do the Textbooks Say?

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Abstract

In a critical analysis of the programs that lift children out of poverty, Shore (2013) stated, “The gap between what we know about what children need, and what we do to ensure that they get it, has grown larger than ever.” The premise of this study is to report the role played by social studies textbooks in addressing poverty so that we can potentially shrink the widening gap between knowledge and need. To explore the United States recorded knowledge of poverty, unemployment and homelessness, the author analyzed two K-6 social studies textbook series. Historical depictions of whites during the Great Depression, Native-Americans when their land was absconded, and African-Americans, who were enslaved, reinforce the horrors as well as ethnic stereotypes but do not place the events into an ongoing contextualized legacy of the complex relationships among class, race, ethnicity and gender. The study illuminates the important contributions offered by social studies textbooks and provides a critical analysis of the ways in which the textbooks fall short of incorporating the national dialogue among scholars who debate the underlying causes as primarily grounded in macroeconomic structures, microeconomic issues of individual responsibility, or both.

Keywords: poverty, homelessness, unemployment, community programs

Critics argue that the US economy, while strong in some areas, has not overcome the stratification of wealth that has limited economic access and social efficacy for marginalized groups. In addition, there are many aspects of poverty that still remain far from our grasp in curriculum materials. Psychologist G. Stanley Hall views the teaching of history as an opportunity to inspire the ideals of social service and unselfishness. Addressing poverty is one way to expose harsh realities that require attention.

Textbook publishers take a somewhat positive orientation as it is difficult to sell books that are written from a critical perspective. In Language Police Ravitch (2004) reported the limitations and challenges in writing for the masses in public education. Through censorship, value differences often become sanitized to the point of obscurity. If social studies textbooks are not addressing issues of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment, a significant proportion of the school population is being ignored, another significant portion of the school population is being reinforced as privileged, and no one is charged with responsibility for changing the status quo.
Textbooks are not the only sources of information for learning about poverty, homelessness, and unemployment. The review of literature revealed a variety of studies that explored effective ways to learn about these social conditions through service learning and juvenile literature (Fox, 2010; Martin & Smoken, 2010; McEachron, 2005; Gorski, 2004). These efforts on the part of teachers are noteworthy, but the focus on textbooks for this study is intentional because textbooks are constructed by a cadre of professionals—teachers, teacher educators, historians, and economists, for example—who are aware of the latest scholarship in the social sciences. As stated by Clawson (2002), textbooks are often the most visible part of the curriculum and are presented to students as objective and factual rather than through a critical lens. Barnes & Keleher (2006), for example, point out that some textbooks are written from an individual agency and foundational ethical standard that operate outside of cultural pressures.

In elementary schools, textbooks continue to be a major source of information. The two companies selected for this review are major publishers of educational materials. McGraw-Hill Education (MHE) publishes educational materials as both traditional and online/multimedia learning tools and has a division devoted to Pre-K through 12th grade. Pearson Education is the world's largest educational publisher, publishing textbooks, workbooks, and other materials for K-12 classrooms. See Appendix A for list of textbooks reviewed.

**Theoretical Framework and Empirical Research**

Critical pedagogy is a theory and philosophy that is based on the work of Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire challenges students to think critically about their education so that they will not be oppressed but rather liberated by the potential of a good education. He developed the notion of *praxis*, the notion that an individual can make a difference in the world when actions are based on sound theory and values. Building on Freire’s theory, Giroux’s critical analyses maintain that social reforms should be considered through analyses of white privilege. Giroux investigates racism and classism in relation to those who have been privileged in the US as a result of the history of Anglo dominance during and after colonization. Giroux (1997, p. 315) argues that “educators need to connect Whiteness with a new language of ethnicity, one that provides a space for White students to imagine how Whiteness as an ideology and social location can be progressively appropriated as part of a broader politics of social reform.” Through the following alarming quote, Nietzsche reveals the tradition of white privilege bias in textbooks. In *Old Textbooks*, Nietzsche (1965) quotes an author published in 1840:

> The European or Caucasian is the most noble of the five races of men. It excels all others in learning and the arts, and includes the most powerful nations of ancient and modern times. The most valuable institutions of society, and the most important and useful inventions, have originated with the people of this race. (p. 216)

Other more recent scholars such as Asimakopoulos (2011) argue against corporate exploitation on behalf of the working class. His scholarship examines power relationships based on socio-economic levels, corporations, and employment. When combined, the theoretical approaches by Freire, Giroux and Asimakopoulos encourage educators to critique the family, the workplace, and local, state and national policies that affect the overall economic structures and individuals in the US. In the section that follows this approach will be explored in relation to knowledge about poverty, homelessness, and unemployment found in textbooks.
As early as the 1960s, educators have conceptualized curriculum as a spiral, whereby groundwork is laid for concepts that increase in levels of detail and sophistication as students progress through their formal schooling. Support for this notion comes from the cognitive theory advanced by Bruner (1960, p. 33) who stated that any subject, “in some intellectually honest form” and with the proper structuring, can be taught to individuals at any stage of development. With this theory in mind, the current study makes an important contribution to textbook portrayals of poverty by investigating the elementary levels, previously unexplored. The investigation of elementary social studies textbooks is guided by the research questions: How do K-6 textbooks depict poverty, unemployment, and social programs historically and in the modern era? In what way do K-6 textbooks address the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, and gender in cultural contexts? In what ways do K-6 textbooks address poverty in relation to individual responsibility (micro), social structures and values (mezzo), and institutional policies and values (macro)? Critical pedagogy provides a theoretical structure from which to challenge the manner in which texts are written from limited perspectives.

A literature review revealed no studies that specifically examined poverty, homelessness and unemployment in the context of K-6 social studies U.S. textbooks. However, there have been numerous studies that have critiqued the ways in which social studies lessons have not only oversimplified historical events but through an over-simplification have contributed to the stereotypical depictions of various peoples. For example, Brophy and VanSledright (1997), reported that:

…many students’ learning was distorted by certain persistent naïve conceptions or confusions…Some images of Native Americans were rooted in the Ice Age and pictured Native Americans migrating to a continent that contained animals but no people, whereas other images were rooted more in the eighteenth or nineteenth century and depicted Native Americans retreating westward ahead of an advancing frontier. (p. 119)

Loewen’s (2010) research on textbooks makes explicit the limits to depicting what actually happened in relation to what textbook writers and publishers are comfortable exposing. Loewen writes:

Whatever the specific reasons that prompt textbooks to lie or omit, what is distorted or left out usually points to times and ways that the United States went astray as a nation. The reciprocal relationship between truth and justice suggests that such issues usually remain unsolved in our own time. For that reason, it may be more important to understand what textbooks get wrong than what they get right. (p. 80)

The premise of this study is the exploration of texts that may have not quite yet gotten right the themes of poverty, homelessness and unemployment. In the tradition of Locke (2009) one of the desired outcomes is to discover ways in which critical pedagogy can be applied through classroom discourse in relation to the examination of social studies textbooks. In a study conducted by Locke (2009) in Costa Rica, critical pedagogy was applied to the manner in which environmental education was taught through elementary science textbooks and teachers. Locke (p. 97) found that the curriculum allowed teachers to encourage “their students to actively interrogate and analyze contradictions between the reality in their communities and official economic and environmental policies.” Despite the absence of critical pedagogy in relation to poverty in elementary social studies
texts, there have been empirical studies that provide valuable insights for the manner in which poverty is addressed in college and high school textbooks.

**Research Studies**

In a study of the “race coding” of poverty in college government textbooks, Clawson and Kegler (2000, p. 185) find their research “dismaying that the portrayal of poverty in American government textbooks is nearly as inaccurate and stereotypical as its depiction in mass media sources.” The images in the college textbooks could lead college students to think that African Americans make up 50% of all poor people when in reality they constituted 27% of the poor in 1996; Latinos were represented as 15% of the textbook poor, but constituted 24% of the poor; more adult males are depicted as poor (56%) compared to 44% females when among the true poor, men make up 38% of the adults in poverty. In a later study, Clawson (2002) found that economics textbooks perpetuated the race coding of poverty, mirroring the findings in government textbooks. For example, Clawson reported more than 60% of the poor people pictured in the textbooks were Black, which is in contrast with previous research that demonstrated that 26% of the poor are African American. Whites made up 26% of the textbook poor, but in reality represented 46%. Clawson (2002, p. 352) also reported that White faces were associated as the deserving poor with the most popular social welfare program in the US, Social Security, whereas Blacks were linked with “nonsympathetic portrayals of the poor....”

In another college study, Gardner, Tuchman, & Hawkins (2010) developed a problem-based learning project for students working on their Masters in social work. The purpose of the project was to challenge students to move beyond narrow views of poverty tied to individual failing and investigate the interrelated micro (individual), mezzo (family and small social groups), and macro (large institutions) factors that contribute to urban poverty and community well-being. Social workers view poverty as “rooted in historic and contemporary social structures, policies, and values that support the inequitable distribution of resources among individuals and communities” (p. 147). The following indicators of community well-being resulted from their exploration of urban poverty: education and human capital, public and mental health, labor and employment, housing and asset development, and family and social structure. Additional variables were listed within each category.

A review of high school textbooks reveals similar patterns with regard to the intersection of race, ethnicity and class. Kearl (2011, p. 59) reports that “poverty is not pictured among the photographs that surround textual discussions” of the urban riots of the late 1960s. Kearl argues that high school textbooks feature photographs and images that tell one of two visual narratives: either the riots are not “in harmony with existing forms of complaint as practiced by the Civil Rights Movement or they were motivated by the [Black Panther Party]” (p. 56). By focusing on individual rioters, Kearl (2011, p. 84) maintains that the textbook authors “conceal the economic and structural conditions that found African American[s] predominantly located in the declining urban centers of the 1960s.”

Another study relevant to middle school social studies curricular approaches investigated adolescents’ beliefs about poverty and inequality. Misty, Brown, Chow and Collins (2012) investigated the reasoning of eighth graders about the causes of poverty and economic inequality. The eighth graders’ teachers provided explicit teaching about the complex reasons for poverty to counter and reduce youth’s predominant tendency to endorse individualist explanations for why people are poor. The authors expected the curriculum to affect attitude change because of the emphasis
upon perspective taking and empathy toward the poor. Instead, while students showed gains in their knowledge of the causes of poverty and success and deemphasized individualistic causes of poverty, there was no change in their beliefs about the government’s responsibility, nor were references made to structural factors. The authors concluded that not enough explicit information about the structural causes of economic inequality was included in the curriculum.

Yet, Seider (2011) conducted a study with adolescents and found a significant decline over the course of the semester in their support and empathy for Americans contending with homelessness, despite achieving “a greater recognition of the role that situational factors—low wages, job shortages, racism, lack of affordable housing, poor educational opportunities, and so on—can play in contributing to poverty and homelessness” (p. 22). Seider concluded that protecting their existing world views and sense of self required the adolescents “to characterize the position of the homeless at the bottom of the class structure as warranted” (p. 24).

Jordan (2004) argues for the fusion of theories that explain poverty in cultural and behavioral terms with theories that explain poverty in economic and structural terms. Jordan’s theoretical model stresses the integration between cultural models, structural environments and behavioral outcomes. Investigating the integration among these modalities as well as the intersections with race, class and gender are major objectives of this textbook review.

**Methodology**

The methodology employed a structured approach to document analyses. According to Maxwell (2013), structured approaches help to ensure the comparability of data across times, settings, and researchers. The structured approach entailed: (1) selecting social studies textbook series across seven grade levels from two publishers, (2) developing operational definitions for the concepts and themes for investigation, (3) conducting a pilot study to refine coding instrument and develop inter-rater reliability protocols, (4) textbooks examination by the researcher and graduate assistants, (5) cross-referencing concepts and themes identified by researcher and graduate assistants to ensure inter-rater reliability, (6) creating data tables for each grade level for the mutually agreed upon categories of poverty, programs, homelessness, unemployment and historical events, (7) interpreting the data tables with regard to the theoretical constructs of individual (micro), small family/social units (mezzo), and large institutional units (macro), (8) interpreting the data tables with regard to the theoretical construct of examining social justice issues in relation to the intersecting domains of race, class and gender.

**Data Sources: Textbooks**

Textbooks for seven grade levels (K-6) from two publishers, McGraw-Hill (Banks, et.al., 2011) and Pearson (Boyd, 2003), were examined for their attention to the following themes: poverty, historical events that illuminate economic conditions, programs developed to address impoverished conditions, unemployment, and homelessness. Contents of text narratives as well as photographs were analyzed. The textbooks were selected from The College of William and Mary Learning Resource Center, which is a designated holdings site for the State of Virginia state-adopted textbooks and through Inter-Library Loan.
Operational Definitions

To guide the focus of the textbook reviews the following operational definitions were developed: community programs—programs designed by local, state, and federal governments or the private sector to lift individuals and families out of poverty; historical events—events in US history that describe individual and/or widespread conditions of poverty (impoverished conditions may have been caused by natural disasters, failing economies, or political regimes); homelessness—people who do not have a regular dwelling; poverty—a stated economic level of poverty or reference to conditions due to poverty such as poor healthcare, housing or education; unemployment—a condition in which people who are without work and actively seeking work.

Pilot Study and Inter-rater Reliability

Bresciani et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of a shared vocabulary in rating sheets used by multiple reviewers. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the author and a graduate assistant examined upper elementary and primary level social studies textbooks that were not a part of those selected for the current study. Prior to reviewing textbooks, coding sheets were developed with careful attention to operationally defining areas to be coded. After reviewing the textbooks separately, the author and her graduate assistant compared coding sheets. Areas of agreement were noted. Discrepancies were discussed and, when appropriate, textbooks were re-examined together to reach greater consistency. It became evident that some of the visuals were ambiguous with regard to the context in which they were placed in the texts and therefore the ambiguity would need to be noted during data collection. It also became evident that researcher bias manifest itself in interpreting the images when there was no description to go along with the visuals. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the researchers added a section for comments by the researchers to keep separate their interpretations from descriptions of text narratives and visuals. In qualitative inquiry, each reviewer brings a unique perspective, so greater emphasis in these discussions was placed on whether each reviewer had recorded textual and visual representations in a congruent manner than achieving complete agreement, consistent with the recommendations of Harris, Pryor, and Adams (1997). The Depictions of Programs, Poverty, Homelessness, Unemployment and Historical Events Coding Instrument is shown in Table 1.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher and two graduate assistants reviewed the textbooks over a period of several months during 2013 and 2014. After reviewing the textbooks the data was categorized into organizational, substantive and theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2013). The organizational framework was by grade level, K-6. The substantive framework was poverty, homelessness, unemployment, historical events and programs. Both the organizational and substantive framework is evident in Table 1. The Depictions of Programs, Poverty, Homelessness, Unemployment, and Historical Events Coding Instrument. Using the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy, notions of privilege were analyzed in relation to race, gender, class and poverty. Once the tables for each grade level were developed which showed the intersection between grade level and the substantive categories, the author highlighted the information based on contextual references to individual (micro/green), small family/social units (mezzo/yellow), and institutional units (macro/aqua). Inter-
preparations based on category were then developed and summarized in Table 2. Grade Level Depictions of Programs, Poverty, Homelessness, Unemployment and Historical Events. A further analysis resulted in noting whether or not the examples linked any combinations of race, class and gender, as indicated by shading in red. A synthesis of the findings is presented in Table 3. Concept Alignment for Interpretations of Poverty, Homelessness, Programs, and Unemployment in Relation to Micro, Mezzo and Macro Contexts and the Intersections of Race, Class and Gender.

Findings

Review of K-3rd Grade Textbooks

The primary grades textbook references structurally aligned with the small family and community groups, individual contributions, and occasional references to larger national units.

**Kindergarten.** Visuals depicted small family and community groups (mezzo). However, they were ambiguous and left open to interpretation by teachers and students. For example, one visual of people serving food could be interpreted as serving the poor or it could be a community event such as a picnic. At first glance, another depiction of a family alongside a trailer could be in a trailer park, but upon closer examination the family could be on vacation. These visuals and lack of text which clarifies the context for the picture fall short of introducing topics about those who receive food through food banks, for example, or families who may live in trailers or other forms of housing that are not typically middle-class, but not necessarily poor. Biographies could also be included to address the micro levels of economic understanding. Macro levels might be addressed by discussing programs such as Head Start.

**First grade.** The two textbooks series addressed individual (micro) contributions to help the poor through biographical information about Jane Addams, George Washington Carver and Eleanor Roosevelt. The Glencoe McGraw-Hill series made explicit that Eleanor Roosevelt was assisting the homeless and stressed her humanitarian efforts during the Great Depression. At the small and family group levels (mezzo) programs such as *Kid's Kitchen* and a *Global Awareness Activity* whereby students and their families collect resources such as food, school supplies, and medicine, for the impoverished in other countries. In a Pearson-Scott Foresman text, the point was made that Abraham Lincoln was poor and a picture of his log house was shown. In other pictures, Native Americans and enslaved Africans were also depicted in impoverished contexts. Without explanations or parallel structures, first graders could be receiving mixed messages about the masses of Native Americans and enslaved Africans as poor whereas the young poor White becomes President of the United States. Recalling that Clawson (2002, p. 352) reported that White faces were associated as the deserving poor with the most popular social welfare program in the US, Social Security, whereas Blacks were linked with “nonsympathetic portrayals of the poor....” it is an important insight for curriculum developers to note. When inserting visuals and text, it is important to look critically to determine if using the example of White poor is contextualized as a positive example of the Horatio Alger myth while using the minority examples as massive poor are used as examples of stereotypes without examination of the social and political causes.

**Second grade.** The second grade visuals and texts featured individual (micro) contributions through César Chavez’s activism for workers’ rights and Anna Beavers who mended and
bought new clothes for children in need. *Kids Care Clubs* were show to represent small community efforts (mezzo) to support the homeless. Pictures of immigrants are shown in the context of describing historical events such as coming through Ellis Island and seeking jobs and a new life in the United States. While still ambiguous regarding macro or structural differences, Pearson-Scott Foresman did point out that the enslaved were not paid for their hard work. Enslaved by whom is not discussed or explained, again another missed opportunity to educate students about structural and policy issues (macro) rather than leave the second graders with unanswered questions regarding why. The intersection of class and race takes place through the power of suggestion, that is, by showing pictures of the enslaved as black and the “masters,” e.g., enslavers, as white. When describing César Chavez, Pearson-Scott Foresman also points out that the migrant workers lived in cars and trucks, another way to depict homelessness in relation to migrant workers.

**Third grade.** Individual (micro) contributions of Jane Addams, Emily Bissell, César Chavez, and Madame C. J. Walker were featured. Small family and social groups (mezzo) such as Hull House for immigrants, Project Backpack for students to support Hurricane Katrina victims, and community service home-building projects to help the homeless were presented. On a larger scale (macro), company efforts to give college scholarships, the founding of the Red Cross chapters, Chavez’s fight for new laws that gave migrant workers fairer pay, medical care and better housing, Mansa Musa’s use of taxes in ancient Mali to support schools, libraries, mosques and farmers, and discussing the class differences between plebeians and patricians in ancient Rome which sometimes resulted in homelessness for the plebeians, were events that illustrated class differences and large-scale efforts to support people across the class divide. When examining these ideas through the lens of the intersection of race, gender and class, more could have been done with Madame C. J. Walker’s biography of humble beginnings as an African-American to millionaire, not necessarily to emphasize that she was an exception in her time, but to describe the significance of the accomplishments by explicating the cultural context that was far from supportive to African-Americans generally.

**Review of 4-6th Grade Textbooks**

At the fourth grade level, social studies textbooks focus on state history, in this case, Virginia history. In Virginia, state standards emphasize social studies content divided by history up to 1865 and history from 1856 to the present. When teachers present the information varies among school divisions, but regular assessments are given in fifth through eighth grades. Generally speaking, upper elementary texts included historical events that economically disenfranchised people through natural events, enslavement, colonialism and imperialism. Yet, these events were locked in time and locked in ethnic groups to these time periods. For example, Native Americans were often depicted losing their lands to European colonizers and visually presented walking in horrible conditions on the Trail of Tears, but their ongoing efforts for federal recognition, for example, were either ignored or vaguely referenced. African-Americans were also depicted in severe conditions as enslaved, oppressed by Jim Crow Laws, or victims of segregation, but ongoing issues related to re-segregation were absent. Indigenous populations and later Hispanic-Americans were portrayed as losing their territories during Spanish colonization and later the Mexican-American War, but ongoing issues related to bilingual education and immigration reform were absent. Asian-Americans were depicted as exploited during the building of the railroads and gold rush, but the need to address ongoing stereotypes associated with being the *model minorities* was absent.
This limited overview does not address other groups such as the many various ethnic groups from the Middle East; such groups were, for the most part, invisible in the social studies textbooks. Collectively, however, the locked-in nature of depicting ethnic groups does little to present the ongoing legacies of historical events. Critical pedagogy in relation to the intersections of race, gender and class is weak or non-existent in social studies at these grade levels.

**Fourth grade.** The individual efforts (micro) on behalf of the poor by John Mitchell, Jr., Maggie Walker, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), Booker T. Washington and Arthur Ashe were described. At the mezzo level, activities such as soup kitchens and modern shelters and food banks illustrated ways to help the less fortunate. More macro descriptions provided the large scale efforts by the Freedmen’s Bureau during Reconstruction, FDR’s New Deal, and Habitat for Humanity addressing unfairness in the housing market. Other large-scale historical events that locked in ethnic groups were described above. Both Pearson-Scott Foresman and Glencoe McGraw-Hill described the intersection of class, race, and gender when explaining how sharecropping perpetuated a cycle of poverty for newly freed African Americans after the Civil War. Pearson-Scott Foresman also described the decimation of the Powhatans by the European settlers. Glencoe McGraw-Hill also explained that women, the enslaved, Native Americans, and white men who did not own property could not vote in colonial society.

**Fifth and sixth grades, up to 1865.** Individual contributions (micro) to help raise people out of poverty were described in relation to John Oglethorpe, Olaudah Equiano, Sojourner Truth, Jane Addams, Francis Cabot, Harriet Tubman and Clara Barton. Family and small social group efforts (mezzo) were described in relation to Sisters of Charity, Hull House, Lowell Girls, and the Underground Railroad which started small but became large-scale. Large-scale conditions and events (macro) were described in relation to the Dutch West Indian Company, the Virginia Company, the Freedmen’s Bureau, indentured servitude, slavery and forcing Native Americans to leave their homelands. The intersections of race, class, and gender were explained in the context of the white southern class system (e.g., yeomen, tenant farmers, rural poor and plantation owners), Fallen Timbers, Treaty of Greenville, Trail of Tears/Indian Removal Act, imprisonment for those who could not pay debts, and Black Codes. Marriage and property ownership laws were discussed but overall impact on employment opportunities for women were not made explicit; Pearson Scott-Foresman did tie voting rights to male ownership of property.

**Fifth and sixth grades, 1856 to the present.** Individual contributions (micro) to help raise people out of poverty were described in relation to Jane Addams, Booker T. Washington, Mary Harris (Mother Jones), Jacob Riis, Eugene Debs, Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and César Chavez. Family and small social group efforts (mezzo) were described in relation to Hull House, Habitat for Humanity, and mutualistas, community-based mutual aid societies for Mexican immigrants to the U.S. On a large-scale level (macro), numerous programs were mentioned: War on Poverty and public works projects whose abbreviations will be used due to limited space—RFC, NRA, PWA, TVA, HUD, CCC, FERA, AAA. Other social programs included American Indian Movement, National Congress of the American Indians; emergency relief programs for women; Indian Reorganization Act; the New Deal/Second New Deal; Social Security Act of 1935; Fair Labor Standards Act banned child labor; Medicare and Medicaid; emergency relief programs for women; National Organization of Women’s effort to pass the Equal Rights Amendment; United Farm Workers and Knights of Labor.
Other efforts with large-scale impact included the 1917 law passed to bar from voting immigrants who could not read in their own language. The forced confinement of Japanese-Americans to internment camps was also described.

Glencoe McGraw-Hill illustrated intersections between class and race during Reconstruction pointing out that between 1865 and 1896 African American struggled to get credit and jobs and that sharecropping lead to a cycle of debt for poor farmers. The same series tied poverty to crime, health problems, and orphans. Pearson-Prentice Hall pointed out that black soldiers were paid less than white soldiers. Pearson-Prentice Hall stated that many people left cities and moved to suburbs and, as a result, people in cities lost tax revenues. Glencoe McGraw-Hill stated that the rich found loopholes in the draft; inflation brought hardships for working class in nation and that child workers in sweatshops faced poor conditions and long days. McGraw-Hill specified that whites moved to the suburbs.

An interesting contrast emerged when the coding sheets from To 1865 were placed side-by-side with Post 1865. On the one hand, the historical narratives prior to 1865 described the past in terms that suggested that social injustices had occurred, though there seemed to be an absence of language like social injustice or other pejorative labels in reference to conditions of slavery, forcing Native Americans off their land, or exploiting women and children in sweatshops. On the other hand, the historical narratives after 1865 emphasize the programs that emerged to eradicate poverty, homelessness, and unemployment, especially after the Great Depression and World War II. The hidden message seems to be that as long as there is a program in place to address the issues, the issues have been addressed. This brings us full circle to the opening paragraphs which state that poverty, homelessness, and unemployment remain hidden in our educational discourse and, based on this study, in social studies textbooks.

**Discussion**

This study demonstrates that addressing controversial issues or sensitive topics continues to be a challenge for social studies textbook writers and curriculum developers. This is true at all K-12 levels. In October 2014 hundreds of high-school students in Jefferson County, Colorado, gained national attention as they protested a proposed curriculum review. The school board’s recently elected conservative majority wanted the district’s Advanced Placement history curriculum to present positive aspects of US history, promote patriotism and to avoid encouragement of civil disorder and social strife. Those in opposition argued that such goals reflected censorship and that the U.S. was founded on the principles that the conservative members of the school board were trying to prevent. Four Jefferson County high schools were forced to close when teachers didn’t show up to teach in September and in October (Tumulty & Layton, 2014).

At the elementary level addressed in this study, there are no easy explanations for the vagueness, invisibility, and stereotypes that surround poverty, homelessness, and unemployment. It is far too easy to argue that elementary students are too young to understand or that they should be sheltered from such topics when the literature review revealed that the high school and college textbooks also are woefully inadequate. Scholars argue that our current malaise toward discussions of poverty is rooted in U.S. culture and institutions.

Sadker and Zittleman (2012, p. 218) offer historical antecedents regarding why Americans have tolerated economic inequities: the tradition since colonial times of having local communities, and thus local taxes, as a main source of economic support for schools; the Horatio Alger story which reinforces the individual’s ability and will to overcome obstacles; genetics as promoted by
Hernstein and Murray’s *The Bell Curve*; notions of the culture of poverty which purports that poor people live in and are shaped by the problems inherent in impoverished communities, problems that cannot be remedied through additional school funding; flawed studies on educational spending such as the Coleman study in the 1960s which had major methodological flaws; and examples where increased funding did not result in increased test scores.

To address some of the entrenched American values described by Sadker and Zittleman, Seccombe (2000) presents practical lessons learned from research conducted with families in poverty in the 1990s. Providing recommendations for the 21st century, Seccombe identifies six practical areas that policy makers should address before headway can be made: enforcing child support via the Child Support Act, addressing gender and racial discrimination, addressing childcare costs, increasing public transportation, raising minimum wage, and increasing access to health care. These timely policy issues capture the stress points for individuals and families living in poverty. Making these issues accessible to elementary and middle school students, as well as high school students, should be an important goal for curriculum reformers.

In addition to policy issues, *Abbott v. Burke* (1990, 1998) exposed a new line of litigation that focuses on *adequate education* guarantees. Such litigation has resulted in a more equitable distribution of funds to poorer school districts and, in turn, has addressed the long-term legacy of education limited by property taxes in lower income areas. More recently, DeMatthews (2015) reports the actions of an elementary principal in a high-poverty urban school who practiced social justice leadership to create a more inclusive school. Making these issues accessible in social studies textbooks would advance the thinking and potentially mobilize action on the part of future generations of citizens and policy makers. Such information would also provide insights into macroeconomic structural issues that impede educational progress for those living in poverty.

Gorski (2008a) cautions curriculum reformers with good intentions. In a critique of Ruby Payne’s framework on poverty for educators, Gorski (2008b, p.131) identifies “eight elements of oppression” that contribute to classism, racism, and other inequities: (1) uncritical and self-serving “scholarship,” (2) the elusive culture of poverty, (3) abounding stereotypes, (4) deficit theory, (5) invisibility of classism, (6) the “it’s not about race” card, (7) peddling paternalism, and (8) compassionate conservatism. Gorski (p. 145) argues that authentic anti-poverty education requires the elimination of ways in which schools perpetuate systems and structures of poverty, including tracking, segregational redistricting, corporatization and the elimination of bilingual education, to mention a few.

**Recommendations for Curricular Reform**

Textbook publishers, including those reviewed in the current study, have made great strides in incorporating events that expose harsh realities throughout American history. But the ongoing legacies tied to these events remain vague and sometimes invisible, resulting in the perpetuation of oppression. Writing texts from a critical pedagogical perspective that challenges assumptions regarding the legacy of power has been a longstanding challenge for curriculum reformers. The following recommendations are proposed, especially with regard to writing about and visually representing the impoverished, unemployment, homelessness and historical events: (1) create parallel structures for various ethnic groups, (2) address micro, mezzo, and macro, economic perspectives and concepts, (3) balance inclusiveness symbolized in visuals with information about the collective cultural context, (4) present value positions and opposing points of view, (5) describe supports and obstacles to conditions of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment, (6) present
multiple economic models for governance, (7) represent the intersections among race/ethnicity, gender, and class. These recommendations, along with illustrations, are described below.

Parallel Structures

The need for parallel structure emanates from the fact that certain ethnic groups remain stereotyped in specific historical events, images, or time periods. For example, in this study, Native Americans were portrayed in relation to their traditional clothing and shelters, again and again. Pointing out cultural differences and similarities during early contact between European settlers and Native Americans is instructive, but the perpetuation of this theme across time periods is primarily applied to the Native Americans. My ancestors, the Scots, wore kilts, but social studies texts don’t perpetuate this traditional clothing across the centuries, even though both the Scots and members of Native American tribes wear traditional clothing to maintain their heritage and for contemporary cultural events. The Scots also lived off the land and used all parts of the animal for clothing, shelter and food, but why is it that these Celtic traditions are seen as insignificant yet the same Native American traditions are overemphasized? As one who participated in the inter-rater reliability review noted, “The texts emphasize the Native Americans using all parts of the animal as the English are writing Magna Carta!” (J. Randall, personal communication, March, 2013). Parallel structure is needed to ensure that economic and political achievements and/or travesties are described across cultural groups rather than emphasizing topics such as textiles and architecture for one group (e.g., Native Americans) and manifest destiny for another (e.g., Europeans). The effort to look for parallels in governance would reveal that the Sioux, for example, had elaborate democratic governance structures. Parallel structures also must be considered in relation to intersecting realities within and across cultural groups.

Intersecting Realities and Legacies among Race/Ethnicity, Class and Gender

This study reported many contributions by individuals from a variety of ethnicities and genders. Banks (1988) describes the many forms of ethnic integration in the social studies curriculum and, no doubt, was influential as one of the authors in the McGraw-Hill series. As Banks indicates, a focus on the contributions of individuals represents a lower level of ethnic integration when compared to the ways in which transformations were made socially and structurally. Writing in a similar vein for gender content in social studies curricula, Tetreault (1987) described levels of gender infusion, identifying the interactions and intersections of gender groups as the most difficult history to write. Historical events throughout the grade levels featured the changing roles for and rights of women. Not being allowed to own property, vote or have access to an education is stated for Anglo women and women of color. Eventually, these social injustices are presumably overcome through the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the right to own property, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka (1954), and individual state ratifications of the Equal Rights Amendment. However, describing these acts of legislation is only a first step in describing the ongoing realities. Passing the legislation did not necessarily change value structures. Balancing these historical events with statistics that describe current inequities in the workplace, women not being paid for their labor while working in the homes, lack of childcare support for mothers who want to work, and the ongoing disparities among men and women of Anglo heritage with men and women of color would go a long way to provide realistic portrayals of US society in relation to legacies of economic oppression.
Micro, Mezzo and Macro Economic Perspectives

The social studies curriculum has traditionally followed the expanding horizons approach, featuring individuals and smaller units of geopolitical space, gradually expanding to include states, nations and the world. This study reaffirmed that overall pattern, resulting in less attention to macro policies at the lower grades. However, the second grade Pearson-Scott Foresman texts did point out that the enslaved were not paid for their labor, not stating an actual policy or law that set this up, but nevertheless, a statement of fact that has the potential for the inquisitive second grader or classroom teacher who would like to pursue the topic further. Greater transparency is needed. Returning to Bruner’s cognitive theory, any subject, “in some intellectually honest form” and with the proper structuring, can be taught to individuals at any stage of development. If students can learn about taxes in the often told historical narrative of the Boston Tea Party, they can learn about the US model of funding for education in relation to property taxes. By exposing this model, it would be possible to involve students in the national debate about how to improve education in urban areas.

Symbols of Inclusiveness and Collective Cultural Context

One of the challenges for curriculum and textbook writers is to write and provide visuals whereby readers can find themselves and their ancestors in the pages of history. While conducting text analyses during my social studies courses, students often point out that women and people of color are represented in photos but seldom included in text narratives. Thus, the visual becomes a way for text writers and publishers to demonstrate inclusiveness but, upon closer examination, it might be on a superficial level. In other instances, a visual may have text to support it, but the visual and text may mislead the reader when the collective context is omitted. The complexity of this challenge was evident in the text which depicted Madame C. J. Walker, the bank owner, as someone who had been able to raise her economic status from poor beginnings to becoming the first self-made female millionaire in the US. In this biographical narrative her success was partially attributed to the virtue of the US free enterprise system. Providing the broader cultural context would have been more informative and would have made her accomplishments all the more remarkable. “During the late 19th and 20th centuries, white workers initiated more than 100 strikes in order to keep black workers from gaining access to certain jobs” (Harris, 1987).

In addition, it might have been useful to place Walker’s exceptional accomplishments in the context that was described by Licht (1988, p. 21) in the following manner: “In 1913, nearly 90% of the black population lived in the South and worked in private homes as servants and on the land as sharecroppers and tenant farmers.” This is not an argument against identifying the exceptions who have overcome incredible obstacles; rather, it is an argument to describe the structures that presented the obstacles and the individuals who designed them.

Opposing Viewpoints and Economic Models

Representing multiple perspectives strengthens social studies curricula. The dynamism of social issues frames healthy debates and reinforces the notion that freedom of speech is valued. Poverty in the US, its root causes and efforts at eradication, should be at the forefront of contemporary social and economic issues in social studies textbooks. The textbooks reviewed in this
study could have been enhanced by including opposing values regarding economic systems globally and in the United States. For example, Brown and Lauder (2001) encourage a national debate regarding why millions of children in the US and Britain live in poverty, some neighborhoods lack basic amenities and the middle classes fear for their families, jobs and futures. They argue that the answer is not to be found in globalization, technological innovation, or personal failings to adapt to changing circumstances as often stated. For Brown and Lauder, the answer lies with the historical legacy of the ‘golden era’ and a narrow focus on market individualism. Instead of referencing one economic model, free enterprise capitalism, social studies textbooks could be improved by also teaching students about state capitalism, state-regulated capitalism, mixed state regulated and private enterprise capitalism, private enterprise capitalism, anarchism, communism, democratic socialism, Marxian socialism, and state socialism.

In closing, this study demonstrated that the depiction of historical events and topics related to poverty, programs, homelessness and unemployment in K-6 textbooks illustrates both progress and weakness. One sign of progress is that, in comparison to the textbooks written during the 19th century, textbook writers and publishers have made strides in tempering their Eurocentric and Anglo-centric approaches. The challenge that remains is to demonstrate that learning occurs in interacting realities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, cultural identity, and religion and that developing knowledge of the structures and policies that create inequities among these realities will enable us to address issues of poverty, homelessness and unemployment.

References


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Appendix A

Table 1

*Programs, Poverty, Homelessness, Unemployment, Historical Events Coding Instrument*

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<thead>
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<th>Publisher (circle): McGraw-Hill Pearson</th>
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<td>Description/Commentary</td>
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**Appendix B**

**Table 2**

*Grade Level Depictions of Programs, Poverty, Homelessness, Unemployment, and Historical Events*

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**Poverty**

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**Historical Events**

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<tr>
<td>Glencoe McGraw-Hill</td>
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Appendix C

Table 3

*Concept Alignment for Interpretations of Poverty, Homelessness, Programs, Unemployment and Historical Events in Relation to Micro, Mezzo and Macro Contexts and the Intersections of Race, Class and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Mezzo</th>
<th>Macro</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pr  Po  Ho  Un  Hi</td>
<td>Pr  Po  Ho  Un  Hi</td>
<td>Pr  Po  Ho  Un  Hi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X     X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>X     X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>X     X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>X     X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>X     X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Pr=Program; Po=Poverty; Ho=Homelessness; Un=Unemployment; Hi=Historical Events; shaded areas represent evidence of intersecting realities of race, gender and/or class.
Appendix D

Textbooks Reviewed


Pearson: Prentice-Hall Imprint, Virginia editions


Pearson: Scott Foresman Imprint


**Ready from Day One?**

*The Relationship Between Length of Pre-Service Teacher Field Residency and Teacher Efficacy*

Theresa Garfield Dorel, W. Sean Kearney, & Esther Garza  
Texas A&M University-San Antonio

**Abstract**

The study examines the perceptions of pre-service teachers’ sense of efficacy in a teacher preparation program to determine whether a relationship exists between teacher efficacy and the amount of time spent in field residency. The paper first examines the existing literature on efficacy and current field residency practices in teacher preparation programs. Following the literature will be an overview of the methodology and results. The findings indicate a significant correlation between length of time in field residency experiences and the pre-service teachers’ sense of General Teaching Efficacy.

**Keywords**: teacher efficacy, field experiences, pre-service teacher experiences, teacher preparation

**Introduction**

Field residency experiences are a mainstay in many teacher preparation programs. Pre-service teachers gain practice through a variety of pre-service opportunities such as observation, small group instruction, whole group instruction, and student teaching. However, in this era of accountability, how are universities measuring the effectiveness and validity of these experiences? In this study, the authors explore the relationship between length of time in field residency experiences and its impact on the pre-service teachers’ sense of teaching efficacy.

**Review of the Literature**

Studies have demonstrated that teacher efficacy is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement (Woolfolk-Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009). Goddard and Salloum (2012) define teacher efficacy as a teacher’s belief in his/her ability to complete a task. They have demonstrated efficacy has a stronger relationship with student achievement than either poverty or ethnicity. It may also be the entry-level ability of students (Jussim, Robustelli, & Cain, 2009). Accordingly, it is vital for teacher preparation programs to ensure their graduates not only possess advanced pedagogy and content knowledge, but also have a strong belief in their own ability to teach.

In a meta-analysis, Brown (2012) found that teachers are more likely to remain in the profession if they have a high sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one’s perception of his or her
effectiveness (Bandura, 1986). This perception is both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. It is important to note that an individual’s sense of self-efficacy can change based on situations and experiences. Bandura (1986) maintained that most experiences in life influence our sense of efficacy. Failing a task the first time may adversely affect self-efficacy. One may have the tendency to think that the task is impossible. However, if that same task is achieved the next time, that person’s sense of self-efficacy increases (Bandura, 1998).

Theoretical Base for Learning and Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977a), learning is rooted in direct experience and results from the positive and negative effects that actions produce. This learning is broken into three categories: informative function, motivational function, and reinforcing function (Bandura, 1977a). One attains learning through modeling of behavior, or observational learning (Bandura, 1986). Observers, Bandura contends, can acquire cognitive skills and new patterns of behavior by observing the performance of others (1986). Attentional processes are those which determine what is “selectively observed in the profusion of modeling influences to which one is exposed and what is extracted from such exposures” (Bandura, 1977a, p. 24). Retention processes affect what a person retains based on remembering. Memory must be in symbolic form in order to affect behavior after the person modeling the behavior is absent. Motor reproduction processes convert symbolic representations to appropriate actions (Bandura, 1977b). Finally, motivational processes drive the responses. If the outcome is one that is valued, it is more likely to produce an action. Efficacy, which is one’s perception of their effectiveness, is therefore essential in effective psychological functioning (Bandura, 1986).

Familiarity with the content presented influences self-efficacy, which is also situation specific (Bergman & Morphew, 2015). A sense of self-efficacy is gained when individuals either observe others completing a task, or complete a task successfully themselves (Zulkosky, 2009). Therefore, one’s sense of self-efficacy directly relates to the task. For example, based on observation and/or participation, one may believe they can play in a recreational softball team, but are not ready for the professional league. The amount of time that an individual has to practice a task has demonstrated a strong relationship with self-efficacy (Lamorey & Wilcox, 2005). Out of Bandura’s seminal work, an emerging body of research has developed relating to teachers and their sense of self-efficacy.

Teacher and Teaching Efficacy

One early teacher efficacy study was conducted by the RAND Corporation in the Los Angeles Public Schools (Armor et al., 1976). The researchers designed this study to measure whether how a teacher felt about his/her control in the classroom influenced reading practices among teachers. This study led to the definition of two types of teaching efficacy: General Teaching Efficacy and Personal Teaching Efficacy (Tschanne-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). General Teaching Efficacy is defined as how much of an impact the respondents believed teachers could have on students, and Personal Teaching Efficacy is defined as how much of an impact the respondents believed they themselves could have on students (Leyser, Zeiger, & Romi, 2011).

Guskey and Passaro (1994) define teacher efficacy as “teachers’ belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 630). Hoy and Miskel (2005) define teacher efficacy as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability
to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplishing a specific teaching task in a particular context” (p. 153).

The culmination of these bodies of research led to an integrated model of teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The authors of this research posit that teaching efficacy depends on context specific tasks. Teachers, who may feel particularly efficacious in one task, may not feel so within the context of another. Hoy and Miskel (2005) stated that teaching efficacy is cyclical in nature. Thus, when possessing greater efficacy, one tends to persist and put out greater effort, which will lead to even greater efficacy. Conversely, when one possesses lower efficacy, there is a tendency to expend less effort and give up, which leads to even lower efficacy. Effort and success directly relate to efficacy, which positively correlates with success in the classroom (Gushue & Whitson, 2006).

Similarly, Shore (2004) found that teacher efficacy is associated with a sense of accomplishment, greater job satisfaction, a sense of control in the classroom, and a willingness to try innovative strategies and practices. All of these attributes contribute directly to student success (Armor et al., 1976; Boz & Boz, 2010). This “empowerment” in the classroom is necessary to affect change in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Evidence supports the idea that teacher efficacy is interdependent with several variables such as the challenge of the teaching task at hand, overcoming cultural barriers such as stereotyping, and the availability of resources (Milner & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2002). It is important to note that the construct of teacher efficacy crosses cultural lines. Teachers of different nationalities and ethnicities deal with the same efficacy issues (Milner & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2003; Tsouloupas, Carson, & Matthews, 2014). Furthermore, teacher efficacy issues are constant across those who are pre-service or novice teachers and teachers in various disciplines (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2005; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, & Witcher, 2002; Utley, Mosley, & Bryant, 2005). Another contributing factor to the efficacy of teachers is the level of administrative support available (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Borgogni, 2003; Shaughnessy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007).

**Teacher Efficacy and Pre-Service Teachers**

Much attention has been given to pre-service teachers’ sense of efficacy in fields such as science and mathematics (Avery & Meyer, 2012; Bates, Latham, & Kim, 2011; Charalambous, Plippou, & Kyriakides, 2008; Swars, 2005). Teachers who have a good understanding of the content in science and math, and who have more hands on experience with the material, are more efficacious. This consensus aligns with Bandura’s (1986) stance that experience will influence the level of efficacy. For example, the amount of material a pre-service teacher was comfortable delivering may directly correlate with the level of efficacy (Choy, Lim, Chong & Wong, 2010).

Tatar and Buldur (2013) examined a teacher preparation program that scaffolds learning in an attempt to improve teacher self-efficacy. This program began with a workshop stage that prepared pre-service teachers to utilize specific strategies. They next moved to an observation stage during which pre-service teachers watched a teacher using those strategies. Finally, pre-service teachers applied their knowledge by leading lessons themselves in the practice stage. Tatar and Bulder (2013) found the pre-service teachers felt that of these three components, the practice part of the cycle was the most essential to achieving a higher sense of efficacy.
There are a number of job stressors, which have the potential to drive teachers away from the profession if they are not sufficiently prepared to deal with them during their pre-service training. Ross, Romer, and Horner (2006) examined self-efficacy in relation to some of the most frequently reported teacher stressors, such as students talking back and parents not holding their children accountable for their actions. What they found was that when educators had school-wide support, they were able to strategize solutions, and their self-perceptions of teacher efficacy increased.

Al-Awidi and Alghazo (2012) found that mastery experiences and vicarious experiences were the most influential sources of self-efficacy in pre-service teachers. Mastery experiences are one’s interpretations of previous authentic experiences performing a task. Therefore, mastery experiences are subjective to a person’s view on how well he/she accomplished a task in the past. Vicarious experiences are those in which a person sees the performance of others on a task and then estimates their own capabilities based on the other person’s achievement (Bandura, 1986). It is imperative, then, that teacher preparation faculty structure field experiences to include practice and observation of master teachers.

**Teacher Preparation Program Approaches to Ensuring Highly Efficacious Teachers**

**District collaborative partnerships.** Teacher preparation programs must provide their pre-service teachers active involvement in school contexts so that the application of teaching approaches and methods can be experienced (Derosier & Sosla, 2014; Goh & Matthews, 2011). In particular, Jenkins, Pateman, and Black (2002) found in their study of partnerships for dual preparation, that teacher education students need experiences in applying the knowledge gathered in the university classroom to the public school classroom setting under the supervision of an experienced mentor and supervisor.

Ledoux and McHenry (2008) address the pitfalls of school and university partnerships by identifying that school partnerships, if not carefully designed and supervised, can lead to some strong challenges that will not meet the university and school district’s goals for pre-service teachers. There are a number of strategies universities can utilize in order to help foster strong partnerships. For example, constant communication between university and school partners can help ensure that master teachers are willing to work cooperatively with a university student. It is also important for universities to ensure the curricula are supportive of the realistic nature of the school classroom. Perhaps most importantly, university faculty must provide adequate supervision to ensure that all requirements for a successful field experience are met (Ledoux & McHenry, 2008).

There are a number of approaches universities can use to ensure they are producing highly efficacious teachers while addressing the needs of students who are interested in becoming the next generation of classroom teachers. In 2013, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) introduced new accreditation standards for evaluating the quality of teacher preparation programs. These new standards now hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the impact program graduates have on student achievement (Haefner, McIntyre, & Spooner, 2014). In light of the new CAEP standards, and given the proven relationship between efficacy and student achievement, teacher preparation faculty may benefit from considering ways to improve teacher self-efficacy beliefs.

**Mentor teacher and pre-service teacher relationship.** The relationship between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher is critical for the development of aspiring educators.
There are a number of potential pitfalls to this relationship. To begin with, there is a power differential in this relationship. Moreover, the mentor and the student have their own distinct needs as experts and learners within the relationship. Loizou (2011) observes that each person in the mentor and teacher relationship contributes to the classroom environment by demonstrating his or her power in different classroom situations. Therefore, Loizou (2011) suggests that mentors and students should engage in discussions about their respective roles in the relationship. Ideally, such a conversation can result in the empowerment of both parties.

According to Martin (2002), the mentor teacher working with pre-service teachers may lack the requisite skills in order to effectively mentor. Moreover, the mentor or cooperating teacher has already faced several challenging stressors that exist within the classroom setting and having a pre-service teacher to guide can result in an additional stressor for the mentor. Typically, the pre-service teacher enters the field experience with strong belief that they will learn from the mentor teacher; however, the mentor teacher may not have been involved in professional development that would have ensured that the pre-service teacher benefited from the field residency experience. In Russell and Russell’s (2011) study, the mentor teacher had the opportunity to voice their reflections, after participating in a two-day workshop, about the mentor/student relationship. The findings from this study indicated that mentors demonstrated that following training, they better understood their roles as mentors, described as supportive role models, and coaches who were empathetic to the mentees (Russell & Russell, 2011). An additional outcome pertaining to mentors should be the understanding of the expectations for being a mentor and asking if they want to be a teacher mentor to a pre-service teacher. Field experience is critical in shaping a pre-service teacher’s beliefs and knowledge base and can help determine the length of time spent in the teaching profession and the quality of the teaching experience (Borko et al., 2000).

**University supervisor and pre-service teacher relationship.** The university supervisor plays an important role in the triad of the field experience between the pre-service teacher and the mentor teacher. However, the university supervisor may be idiosyncratic within the triad, because of the “outside in” approach utilized by supervisor. Too often, the university supervisor may take a snapshot of the pre-service teacher’s practice and not be fully embedded in the experience (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). Moreover, the supervisor’s role will depend on the personalities of each member of the triad and the context where the field experience is occurring (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003). If a pre-service teacher has a personality that requires much nurturing and external support, the university supervisor may play more of an active role in the field residency experience. Whereas, if the mentor teacher has a particularly strong personality and the pre-service teacher responds well to this, the university supervisor may only play a perfunctory role.

In Gimbert and Nolan’s (2003) study, the university and school district engaged in new collaborative efforts, different from traditional approaches to supervision and field placement, to bridge the pre-service teacher’s transition between the university experiences to the classroom setting. Pre-service teachers began their field experience prior to the elementary school students first day of class and assisted their mentor teacher in setting up the classroom they would be a part of for an entire year. The field-based experience was renamed the Professional Development School (PDS) and the university supervisor label became known as Professional Development Associate (PDA). These terms were important for the reconceptualization of the pre-service teacher’s field experience. The findings indicate that readiness and relationship building among the triad members assisted in supporting all the triad members in their established goals of guiding and developing the pre-service teachers into effective teachers. Even though there were several
challenges that occurred for the PDA such as discipline of elementary students and miscommunication between the mentor and pre-service teacher, the PDA was able to solve these challenges through the already established relationship and through the increase in readiness skills of the pre-service teacher. The PDA was successful in being more involved in the student teaching experience yielding more effectiveness as a member of the triad versus what had commonly occurred in traditional supervisory approaches (Gimbert & Nolan, 2003).

Methodology

As faculty in the College of Education at the university in which this research occurred, the researchers have a stake in measuring the effectiveness of the university’s model of teacher preparation. This study is Action Research since this study not only attempts to add to the extant literature in the field, but also inform and improve local practice.

Research Design

This research was causal-comparative in nature which is non-experimental research that seeks to identify relationships between the selected variables. The researchers posed two central research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the amount of time spent in field residency and the perception of general teacher efficacy among aspiring educators?
2. What is the relationship between the amount of time spent in field residency and the perception of personal teacher efficacy among aspiring educators?

Definition of Terms

In order to understand the teaching efficacy of pre-service teachers in a field residency program, the following terms refer to the distinction between pre-service teachers’ general and personal teacher efficacy. General Teacher Efficacy (GTE) is a construct that measures an individual’s beliefs about the efficaciousness of all teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). Personal Teacher Efficacy (PTE) is a construct that measures an individual’s belief about their own level of efficacy as a teacher (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001).

The term field residency is time on task that aspiring teachers or our participants, pre-service teachers, spend applying their theoretical knowledge of content and pedagogy into practice in active K-12 classroom settings (Thorpe, 2014). In this study, the researchers refer to field residency one, field residency two and field residency three. Field residency one and two are 64 clock hours each and require the pre-service teachers to teach lessons in their mentor teacher’s classroom, journal and complete several other prerequisite activities. They occur in consecutive semesters. Field residency one focuses on small group instruction and classroom management. Field residency two encourages whole group instruction, and curricula development. Both semesters include activities such as lesson development, integrating into the school culture, and making accommodations for diverse populations.

Field residency three, also known as student teaching, is a 16 week, 40+ hours per week, fully integrated intern experience during which the student teacher gradually becomes responsible for the full day instruction of the students. The experience in field residency three is a scaffolded
experience that allows the student teacher to assume more of the class responsibilities until the student teacher undertakes teaching the entire day. The university in this study also structures this time during the 16 weeks so the student teacher slowly “backs out” of the full day teaching until the mentor teacher is once again in full control of the classroom. The experiences in field residency one, two and three, are the same format for all pre-service teachers.

**Instrumentation**

To measure the dependent variables of teacher efficacy, the authors of this study utilized the *Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) (Short Form)* developed by Hoy and Woolfolk (1993). The *Teacher Efficacy Scale (Short Form)* is a two-factor instrument measuring Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE) and General Teaching Efficacy (GTE). Participants rate themselves on each of the ten items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 6 (Strongly Disagree).

**Data Collection**

Once the institutional review board approved the study, the researchers distributed surveys during regularly scheduled field residency meetings hosted by the university’s teacher certification center. At the time of survey distribution, the researchers explained the study, and ensured anonymity and confidentiality. Participants who elected to participate did so by signing informed consent documents and completing the survey.

**Participants**

Participants were pre-service teachers seeking initial teacher certification. In all, 462 pre-service teachers elected to complete the survey. They ranged in age from 21 to 62 (mean age 31.08). The majority of the respondents were female at 85%. The ethnicity of the respondents reflects 72% Hispanic, 23% Anglo, 4% African American, and 2% Asian/Pacific-Islander. Non-traditional students (students over the age of 25) comprised 62% of the population. At the time of the survey, 75% of respondents were serving as student teachers in elementary education settings with the remaining 25% serving as student teachers in secondary school settings.

**Variables**

The researchers utilized two separate dependent variables in this study: General Teacher Efficacy (GTE) and Personal Teacher Efficacy (PTE). Sample items from GTE include, “The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background,” and, “If students aren’t disciplined at home they aren’t likely to accept my discipline.” Sample items from Personal Teaching Efficacy include, “When I try really hard, I can get through to most difficult students,” and “If a student in my class becomes disruptive and noisy, I feel assured that I know some techniques to direct him/her quickly.”

The researchers utilized one independent variable in this study. This was the amount of time spent in field residency 1/field residency 2/student teaching. The amount of time spent in field residency and/or student teaching is the independent variable based on the review of the literature, which indicated that time and experience with tasks influence one’s sense of self-efficacy (Lamorey & Wilcox, 2005). Additionally, the focus university recently moved from a 2 semester
to a 3-semester field experience model. Accordingly, the authors wished to examine the impact of time spent in field residency in order to determine if the extended residency has had an impact on self-perceived levels of efficacy among aspiring teachers.

**Statistical Analyses**

This study measured efficacy at the group rather than the individual level. Data were collected and analyzed for four groups of students: (1) students entering their first semester of field residency, (2) students entering their second semester of field residency, (3) students entering their third semester of field residency (which is also referred to as student teaching), and (4) students who had completed all 3 semesters of field residency/student teaching.

Researchers utilized a confirmatory factor analysis in order to confirm the validity of the survey instrument. Next, descriptive analyses ensure the reader that no anomalies existed in the data. Finally, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) measures the variance in teaching efficacy by length of time in student teacher residency.

**Results**

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Descriptive Data**

Results of the confirmatory factor analysis reveal an alpha coefficient of reliability for General Teacher Efficacy within this study of 0.76. The alpha coefficient of reliability for Personal Teacher Efficacy within this study was 0.74. These results are consistent with previous studies (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001) and serve to confirm the usefulness of this instrument. Data were collected from students at 4 points: entering the 1\(^{st}\) semester of field-based residency, entering the 2\(^{nd}\) semester of field-based residency, entering the 3\(^{rd}\) semester of field-based residency (which the university identifies as the student teaching course), and exiting the 3\(^{rd}\) semester of residency (student teaching). The analysis includes means and standard deviations for each of these variables (see Table 1). The reader will note that Table 1 demonstrates a minimum of 75 respondents per data point. This minimum threshold ensures a sample size that accurately reflected the views of the entire population of aspiring teachers within this university.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Field Residency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entering 1(^{st}) semester of Field Residency</th>
<th>Entering 2(^{nd}) semester of Field Residency</th>
<th>Entering 3(^{rd}) semester of Field Residency</th>
<th>Exiting 3(^{rd}) semester of Field Residency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td>130</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PTE Mean</strong></td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PTE Standard Deviation</strong></td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The primary focus of this study was to examine the relationship between the amount of time spent in field residency and teacher efficacy. In order to answer the central research question, the researchers conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). The results of this analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between length of time in residency and Teacher Efficacy, $F(6, 830) = 3.683$, $p<.001$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.949$, partial $\eta^2 = .026$.

Tests of between-subject effects reveal how the independent variable (time in student teacher residency) varies between the two dependent variables (GTE and PTE). Results of the between subject effects reveal one significant and one non-significant relationship. There is a statistically significant relationship between length of time in student teacher residency and General Teacher Efficacy, $F(3, 416) = 5.84$; $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$. There is no significant relationship between time in student teacher residency and Personal Teacher Efficacy within this study, $F(3, 416) = 1.72$; $p = n.s.$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$ (See Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable (Source)</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Partial Eta squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Residency</td>
<td>PTE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Residency</td>
<td>GTE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tukey’s HSD post-hoc analyses revealed an interesting pattern between length of time in student teaching and participants’ perception of General Teacher Efficacy. Students entering their first semester of student teacher residency possessed a relatively strong view of teachers’ ability to affect learning in students ($M=3.93$). This belief drops sharply in the second semester ($M=3.41$), before normalizing at the beginning ($M=4.01$) and end ($M=3.95$) of the third semester (See Table 3).
The researchers were interested in learning whether the average level of teacher self-efficacy changed over the course of time for students throughout their field residency and student teaching experiences. The results demonstrate a significant difference in General Teacher Efficacy (GTE) between these groups, with the lowest levels of GTE being recorded after one semester of field residency, and the highest levels of GTE being espoused after two semesters of field residency. Differences in Personal Teacher Efficacy (PTE) did not rise to the level of statistical significance.

Literature supports that the more time one spends on a task, the greater the sense of efficacy one gains (Feltz, Short, & Sullivan, 2008). In this study, however, pre-service teachers entered with a relatively high sense of GTE, which dropped significantly after one semester of field residency. This could be attributed to the “I didn’t know as much as I thought I did” phenomena or the “Oh no! What did I get myself into?” effect. It may also be attributed to the fact that efficacy may be tied to active learning situations which influence individuals’ sense of efficacy in completing specific tasks (Gaffney, Gaffney, Usher, & Mamaril, 2013). Students entering the first semester of field residency may have a strong sense of GTE because they have a good grounding in theoretical principles and have had practice in a university setting, but lose some of their sense of GTE when they see teaching principles in the realistic setting of a classroom. Quite often, experience supports that these eager first year teachers know just enough to be efficacious, but not enough to maintain efficaciousness. In response to the research questions, a significant relationship emerged between length of time in residency and general teacher efficacy among aspiring teachers.

### Table 3

*Estimated Marginal Means for GTE over Time*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entering Field Residency 1</th>
<th>Entering Field Residency 2</th>
<th>Entering Field Residency 3</th>
<th>Exiting Field Residency 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Teacher Efficacy</td>
<td>3.9284</td>
<td>3.4081</td>
<td>4.0066</td>
<td>3.9468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

...
teachers. While there was also a difference in the marginal means of personal teacher efficacy, these differences did not rise to the level of statistical significance. What is most encouraging within this study is to see that efficacy rose and then stabilized during the 3rd semester of field residency. One possible implication is that for the participants within this study, it takes at least three semesters in field residency in order for aspiring teachers’ sense of self-efficacy to rise and stabilize. Shortening residency requirements could have a deleterious effect on program participants’ levels of self-efficacy.

Limitations

Because this study explored perceptions of participants within one university in the southwest United States, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Survey data collected was absent of student identifiers, negating the possibility of comparing individual student responses over time, as this was not the intent of this study. Additionally, this survey only included pre-service teachers.

Recommendations

This research is of value to the field, as it provides an impetus for replicating this methodology with a wider array of teacher preparation models. It may also be useful to examine whether similar results are found in different regions of the United States or internationally. Other researchers may want to include populations that have a different demographic.

We feel it is important to follow up with graduates once they become practicing teachers. Accordingly, as a next step in our research, we intend to repeat this survey with program graduates in their first, second and third years as K-12 teachers to assess their level of teacher efficacy. This will help us not only assess the effectiveness of our teacher preparation model, it will also provide us with an opportunity to stay in touch with and provide support to program graduates.

Another suggestion when expanding this research is to use time sampling for the participants’ responses. By doing this, one can gain a better sense of individual growth over the three field residency experiences. Future research may also include analyses of individual activities and the impact they may have on efficacy. This can possibly strengthen program recommendations.

Conclusion

In this study, there is a significant relationship between length of time in field residency experiences and the participant’s perception of General Teacher Efficacy. The university utilized this data in a continuous improvement cycle in an effort to improve teacher preparation programs. This research also further validates the usefulness of the TES as a concise measure of teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). K-12 schools are in need of teachers who understand the realities they will face on the job as educators. It is incumbent upon teacher preparation programs to continually evaluate and refine instructional models in order to ensure their graduates are as prepared as possible for these realities. This study suggests that while efficacy may drop after initial exposure to field experiences, students regain their sense of efficacy during the third semester of field residency. This helps solidify the university’s decision to move to a three-semester field residency model.
Time spent on task is essential to increasing a teacher’s sense of efficacy. The longer preservice teachers practice in the actual classroom setting, the more likely they are to increase their sense of efficacy, which in turn can positively affect student outcomes.

References


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Critical Truth-Telling: Educational Inquiry, Bemusement, and Democratic Change
Or
What Happens when a College President, an Entertainer, and Rhetorician Discuss Social Change over Dinner

Aaron M. Kuntz, University of Alabama

Abstract

In this article I engage with the notion of “critical” scholarship as it manifests in our contemporarily absurd times. I ask how our current context in higher education perhaps requires a differently productive sense of critique than traditionally practiced in the academy. Through foregrounding a Foucauldian sense of critique as a “voluntary insubordination” to normalized ways of being, knowing, and coming to know, I seek to reanimate critical work as moral practice—politically engaged ways of being other than we currently are (or are coerced into being). I ground my analysis through an examination of two connected events on my university campus—historical circumstances that challenge common approaches to sense-making. I end with a call for critical educational inquiry as a type of philosophical parrhesia, or truth-telling, that requires scholars to risk their own subject-formations through the political work of disrupting the logical status quo.

Keywords: Critical, truth-telling, parrhesia, methodology, schizoid, critique, Foucault, Deleuze

This article is about a series of seemingly disparate events entangled within one university campus: a machete apparently lodged in a fraternity house door, an African-American entertainer defending racial progress in a civil war era mansion, and a smartphone app designed to promote safety through its use as a social panic button. This article is also about rhetorical techniques utilized to persuade truth, the failure of contemporary critique for social justice, and the folding of social history into an origami-like figure of progress. In short, this article is about sense-making amidst absurdity.

In what follows I address a series of entangled issues and questions: What does it mean to engage in critique? How does such critique intersect with practices of knowing and being? How do our contemporary times require a different sense of critique than times of old—those that do not rely on processes of differentiation, representation, or true/false distinctions for meaning? Lastly, how might our treatment of history extend from a diffractive reading of being or becoming—in short, living—such that critique takes on newly transformative potential? I ground my
approach in an analysis of two connected happenings on my university campus—historical circumstances that certainly challenge notions of reality as linearly progressive or easily announced even as they draw upon a reconstituted collective public memory for their logical articulation.

In the first occurrence, a series of campus emails respond to rumors of future violence on campus, going so far as to recommend a phone application to communicate one’s potential feeling of unease. Administrative actors claim factual clarity through explaining what did not happen—as though the absence of some past happening would put to rest concerns about what might happen in the future. Here, official communication seeks to impact a collective group on the affective level, yet the absence of a full narrative leaves the reader bemused, lacking the necessary grounding to respond in any active way.

The second instance bewilders through a narrated conflation of historical events with contemporary campus issues regarding diversity and perceived institutional progress towards a more equitable university environment. Somewhat ironically, when the university president seeks to demonstrate a continuing commitment to diversity she does so by recalling a visit with Bill Cosby who, while wearing a “property of Alabama football” t-shirt marvels at how far the university has come on issues of social justice. When read in light of recent accusations charging Cosby with rape, the president’s attempted cohesive narrative of progress fails to hold, offering instead a bewildering sequence of events.

This ongoing entanglement of contemporary events with seemingly disparate and untethered social logic often leads to a type of individually-enacted and collectively-felt bemused paralysis—where social happenings seem to push against traditional forms of knowing/coming to know in such absurd ways that we, perhaps, must begin to laugh; we laugh because it is absurd. We laugh, I suppose, because such absurdity has become so commonplace that the critical furrowed brow is no longer as useful for inciting change. We are bemused, as Deleuze (1990) would have it, just as Alice remains bemused by the shifting laws and claims on commonsense that are her experienced wonderland. Given our contemporary context we might productively eschew empty proclamations for “critical” scholarship (assertions that are all the rage these days) in favor of what Deleuze termed a philosophy of the absurd. In this way our disoriented, bemused state is an active one, making possible ways of knowing, coming to know, and being that had previously remained unrealized or short-circuited by normative claims on reality. Perhaps there is promise in a stance of critical bemusement, an activist potential in dwelling within the absurd.

A Critique Of Critical Approaches to Knowing
or
An Invitation to Our Viewers

Before entering into an extended discussion of absurd circumstances I think it important to pause and consider the implications of critical scholarship, particularly as it relates to how inquiry practices might productively engage with contemporary contexts. Thus, this section seeks to foreground a critical engagement with the examples that follow, emphasizing a particular means of encountering select social realities towards productive ends. Yet, what does it mean to be critical, to engage in critique? This question concerns me because it seems that critical scholarship is all the rage these days in higher education: everyone wants to be critical. The danger of such a normative proclamation is that the term critical loses its definitional quality—its ubiquity within ac-
academic discourse results in the term meaning simultaneously everything and nothing. Disappointingly, and as others have noted,1 within the academy the critical locale has become a safe space from which to operate, an all-too-comfortable place in which to situate one’s identity and label one’s scholarship as meaningful. Far from being a place of some risk (either to the subject position of the critic or to the norm that is the object of critique) the critical association has come to denote a degree of positive cache within the academy. Critical is the hipster’s beard, cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon on sale at a trendy bar in Midtown.2 How did this happen? How might we, in turn, reclaim the term for specific practices for social change? If critical is more than an empty term, more than a rhetorical placeholder or verbal tick, then it must imply or convey particular characteristics.

To begin to answer such questions it is perhaps helpful to pause and follow the path set by Foucault (1997) who, in a short lecture entitled “What Is Critique,” revisited the notion of critical work specifically as it relates to the production of normative thought. For Foucault, critical work involves a double practice—one of simultaneously demarcating the boundaries of normative thought and, through noting where such boundaries fail, making possible new (and literally unimaginable—or unthinkable) ways of being, knowing, and coming to know. This doubled position of critique situates thought in both the present (noting the limits of the now) and as in excess to the contemporary moment (pointing towards an as-yet unrealized future). As such, critical work brings the future into the present and this temporal collapse proves a disruptive force. Thus, I take from Foucault that the critical scholar has two interwoven tasks: 1) to understand the means by which otherwise commonsensical rationales develop, producing a host of legitimated practices; 2) to imagine or enable new practices that extend from newly possible forms of knowing.

As I have noted previously (Kuntz 2015), critical work is that which necessarily intervenes in normalizing discourses such that the logic that informs what we already know—what we assume to be—can no longer hold. Common sense fails when set against the critical frame. As such, the critical space is decidedly uncomfortable—a disquiet space for that which receives the critique (and can no longer continue its normative ways unabated) and s/he who formulates the critique (and because relationally bound to the object of critique is likewise changed by the critical act). Critique thus takes on a pedagogical function: guiding one towards emerging ontological and epistemological formations. In this way, critique intervenes in the normative governing structures of the contemporary moment; critique as radical intervention.

Thus it is that critique cannot replicate and can only alter that with which it engages (if some practice were to reinscribe or reinvoke normative ways of being and knowing it simply would not be critical, despite the best of intentions); such attempted critiques are not, as a consequence, critiques at all. Important to the project at hand, Foucault (1997) situates critique in relation to: (1) an unknown future; (2) truth; and (3) coercive practices of governing. Critical work remains oriented towards events that, in some way, intersect these three elements—when a future is prescribed based on some assumed truth and the populace is subjected to normalizing discourses of what was and what must come to be. In this way critique intervenes to disrupt normative logics and practices towards a future that is yet-to-be-known. This is critique as an opening force, an uncomfortable allegiance with an unknown future recognized now in the present; an excess to the known that, through its very utterance, is disobedient to normalized practices of living. In this vein, Foucault offers a general definition of critique as, “the art of not being governed quite so much” or with such costs (p. 45). Critique displays a “voluntary insubordination” (p. 45) to normalized ways of

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1. e.g. Simons et al. 2005.
2. As a further aside, the term critical is also often utilized as a rhetorical device to which there is no answer—who would ever claim an identity position as not critical, or promote a stance of acriticality?
being, knowing, and coming to know. Because from a Foucauldian framework normative meaning is produced “through the effects of coercion” (p. 53), to disrupt such production is a rebellious act—refusing to be governed by the rules of the day. Indeed, it is my concern that the overuse of the term critical has rendered the act of critique relatively meaningless (or lacking a rebellious function). In this sense, what passes for critical work in the academy might well be situated as normatively coercive, lulling the intrepid activist into comfortable acts of rhetorical engagement.  

Following Foucault, Butler (2001) situates critique as questioning the “limits of our most sure ways of knowing” (para. 10). This is critique as exposing (and disrupting) the limits of the epistemological field. Butler’s rendition of critique highlights critical practices as inherently tied to virtue—critical practices extend from a virtuous emplacement within the world. In this way, the critical act takes on moral dimensions: a determination to intervene in normative production because it is the right thing to do. As such, critique is a morally-engaged practice that cannot occur from a disinterested stance; the critic is necessarily invested in disrupting coercive acts of governing. Critical practice stems from virtue, from a moral determination to not submit to or be coerced by normative logic. Critique extends from a refusal to be fully governed or determined by the status quo. As such, being critical means both registering space for insubordination (to act and be differently than one claimed by the norm) and being insubordinate; a resistive ontological and epistemological practice.

For both Foucault and Butler, being governed according to normative domains comes with particular costs (to freedom, to democracy, to subjectivity) and thus critical practices are moral practices—politically engaged ways of being other than we currently are (or are coerced into being). Critical work refuses to accept the costs of acting and being as we always have been, of accepting the costs of existing as governed subjects. Yet this is, of course, no easy task: how to make visible the limits of the very logics and assumptions under which one operates? How does one identify the edges of the knowing environments of which one is a part?

In order to enact critique and make visible the epistemological and ontological limits that circumscribe the norm one must begin with what Foucault (1984) deemed problematization—bringing forth an object of thought as an historical problem without resolution. In this sense, the object of thought is uncertain—it can never fully be accounted for (otherwise it would not be a problem) nor familiar (else it would continue unrecognized). Yet, it is precisely the uncertainty of such problems that draw forth a social anxiety that, in turn, feeds a desire to account or otherwise manage the difficulty of non-closure.

As a contemporary example, consider the social anxieties that extend from the implicit ordering mechanisms of globalized neoliberalism, particularly as they manifest in education. Principles of globalization enforce a macro-oriented perspective on social practices and policies that often eradicate state or national boundaries in favor of large-scale conversions of people (and their outputs) into measurable forms of data. Neoliberal values privilege select formations of data, making possible a host of comparisons that virtually ignore local contexts in favor of macro-level comparisons. Thus it is that the United States (U.S.) is often statistically-related to other countries.
based on these manufactured points of comparison. And, as a consequence, there is no small amount of anxiety that extends from politicians and the public alike when the United States is not at the top of these rankings. We are told that the U.S. is “falling behind” other countries in high school math achievement, for example, or middle school literacy levels. Such information is inevitably linked to parallel anxieties that the U.S. will fall behind other nations (notably China and Germany) in economic production and will hold less power (and corresponding position of privilege) within the world order. When conflated, these anxieties (of failing to keep up with the frenzied pace of globalized neoliberalism, of falling behind other nations according to select economic indicators) provide the energy and rationale for a large-scale testing industry that, in turn, offers the data through which educational policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top are born. As a consequence, individual educational practices (such as learning and test-taking), large-scale national policies (such as Race to the Top), and ongoing social anxieties (such as our position as a leader in the world order) are not so much layered as entangled, a dense skein of practices, processes, and affects from which extend a series of truths and realities seemingly without end.

Part of the process of problematization entails disengaging from the object under scrutiny. As such, the problematizing act is a resistive act of freedom—the critic is no longer so caught up in the object that s/he cannot recognize its boundaries. Through allowing thought to act upon some process or practice of knowing/being one recognizes the critical act as in excess of that which it engages. Thus, problematization begins with the acknowledgement that ways of knowing and being are never fully accounted for, never previously determined. Critical work in excess of, and no longer accountable to, the normalizing objects under scrutiny.

Part of the issue with how critique has been shortchanged in the past extends from the habitual ways in which we have come to reenact "a settled domain of ontology" (Butler 2001, para. 16) through inquiry practices that simply point to contradiction or falsities without making space for an unknown future that exists in excess of normative ontologies. Yet, what happens when the revelation of contradiction fails the critical scholar? What is to be done when our contemporary moment is saturated with contradiction and continues on unabated? What is the critical scholar to do in such absurd times? In short, given our contemporary context, what does it mean to be critical in the here-and-now? Indeed, ours is an oddly absurd time—one where affective states of unease, anxiety, and paranoia seem to predominate—and, as a consequence, the nature of critical work must likewise change.

Social Schizophrenia: The Problem of Social Truths
or
Setting the Table for our Guests

Despite neoliberal claims on the intrinsic values of rationality and consistency, it is often also noted that we live in profoundly contradictory times. National discourses submit that peace

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7. Ben Baez (2014) offers a detailed examination of the database as a governing technology employed in what he terms our “society of the statistic” resulting in the “data-basing of our lives.”

8. See my work with Ryan Gildersleeve and Penny Pasque, Kuntz, Gildersleeve, & Pasque (2011) as we examine how President Obama’s community college initiative extends from anxieties of falling behind in the globalized neoliberal era.

9. Though a thorough treatment of the neoliberal moment is beyond the scope of this article, elsewhere I detail select formations of neoliberalism in relation to processes of globalization (Kuntz 2015).
can only be achieved through armed securitization both at home\textsuperscript{10} and abroad,\textsuperscript{11} that the best way to achieve financial stability is to take on debt, and the best type of productivity is measurable productivity. More than what has been termed in the past as Orwellian doublethink, there exist today a simultaneity of “truths” that, together, manufacture a collectively-felt affective state of disorientation and apathetic distancing from avenues towards social change. This is to say that our contemporary problem is not simply an inability to distinguish truth from falsity but rather the incessant overproduction of multiple truths that remain side-by-side without productive consequence; such truths simply remain. As a consequence, the singular act of pointing out that one truth potentially contradicts another serves no critical or disruptive function on its own. Contra-diction is no longer the place from which social justice may grow.\textsuperscript{12} Instead, there must exist a moral position articulated through acts of truth-telling: statements that these things cannot be.\textsuperscript{13}

Amidst this over-production of truth I am struck by the amount of social energy, time, and anxiety that goes in to managing (or rationalizing away) their commonsensical alignment. These daily practices maintain normative function and, as such, might usefully be the objects of our inquiry and critical intervention. With this conceptual shift to the mechanisms by which various truths are maintained and procedurized, there is increasing concern for how such work instills collective affective states (of disorientation, paralysis, or even bemusement). Our contemporary moment entails allowing such truths to remain side-by-side, distinct and without full resolution. Because of this, our unique time of non-resolution makes possible the formation of a whole host of deeply felt social anxieties, that, in turn, play a key role in maintaining governing structures, processes, and practices. In short, affective states of being develop within a complementary over-production of truths and an inability (and/or collective disinterestedness) to differentiate truth from falsity.

Through the over-production of social truths the true-false binary that we often hold dear dissolves; truth is instead entangled with absurdity. In The Logic of Sense Deleuze (1990) shifts from discussions of the truth to the condition of truth and this latter phrase is “not opposed to the false, but to the absurd…that which may be neither true nor false” (p. 15). For Deleuze, absurdity extends from relations without signification. Yet such relations are not absent sense, nor nonsense, they are absurd, seemingly impossible. As Deleuze points out, the notion of contradiction can only occur when dealing within the realm of the known, or the normatively possible: “for the principle of contradiction is applied to the possible and to the real, but not to the impossible” (p. 35). Thus, the scholar who finds critical satisfaction in pointing to contradiction is forever bound by the normatively possible, pre-determined claims on the real or selective truths. Consequently, such a scholar can never be critical. Instead, opening up the impossible refuses the normative power of contradiction, offering instead the potential that is absurdity. The absurd, in this case, is

\textsuperscript{10} See the recent armed police retaliation to protests in Baltimore, for example, or Ferguson.

\textsuperscript{11} See our continuous acts of warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, operating under the rationale that such “occupations” make both the local region and, by extension, our own country more safe and secure. The logic in this instance seems to be that if we are violent and aggressive over there, then we will not be visited by violence and aggression here in the United States.

\textsuperscript{12} In many ways, the failure of contradiction to make way for progressive change aligns with contemporary theorizations that refuse moves towards synthesis (a move to bring together that is a hallmark of dialectical thinking) and, instead, privilege difference or defractive ways of knowing (a move that begins from the point of difference and makes no attempt to resolve contradictions to the point of synthesis).

\textsuperscript{13} I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me in his/her review of this article.
made visible through its excessive status—excessive truths over-produced to the point of absurdity. Thus, it is not truth as distinguished from falsity that might serve our critical work, it is truth-telling in the face of absurdity.

Drawing from Deleuze’s philosophy of the absurd, Ian Buchanan (2014) examines the contemporary schizo-society wherein we “know” multiple truths and yet have no sufficient means to act in direct relation to them. We thus remain frozen by an inability to discriminate among an ever-intensifying availability of truth-claims. Truths simply remain “out there,” beyond the direct reach of the individual who simply must abide their (multiple) existence. The schizoid thus exists as a modern-day subjectivity that recognizes more truths than one can possibly act upon, a disorientation to the point of non-action. As a result, exposing what is not-true (what is false) or contradictory is no longer a means for challenging or disrupting the neoliberal system in any revolutionary way (as the critical theorists of old, perhaps had it). It is not the production of falsehoods that is the contemporary problem—it is the incessant production of multiple truths that lead to our schizoid state. Perhaps this is why “critical” scholarship has lost its disruptive edge and become a safe harbor within the academy: calling attention to falsehoods fails the schizo-society. This unique circumstance manifests in multiple ways. When seen from a productive distance, frantic attempts to distinguish truth from falsity border upon the absurd.

As an example, early in the fall semester of 2014 a series of confusing stories swirled around my university campus, accelerated by the ubiquity of social media and the entangled overlap of local and global—where present day fears lead to a series of anxious practices and technological innovations all aimed to address issues of safety and security. The result was a social context wherein efforts to differentiate “facts” from “fictions” did little to assuage anxieties and fears of the unknown—indeed, they perhaps heightened them. The events began, it seems, with a series of anonymous YouTube® comments that told of future violence on campus. These comments fueled further rumors of violent acts that were said to have recently occurred on various campus locations. Anxious students reported what they “knew” to one another; concerned parents contacted the university—often to report new information as much as to confirm what their son or daughter had told them was said to have happened and what anonymous comments said would happen. Facts blurred with fictions, past events merged into presumed inevitabilities. In response, the university sought to break the cycle of rumor-fueling-rumor through detailing what was “known” to have happened and what did not happen.

What follows are three emails that were sent via my campus faculty listserv over the course of four days. The first appeared in my inbox on Monday, September 22nd, 2014 and came from the campus police (UAPD) alert account—it consisted of a series of bullet points:

Please see the update below on the events of the last 18 hours regarding safety issues on and off campus.

• UAPD has issued search warrants to social media sites regarding the YouTube comments. Officers continue to process and follow-up with new information and tips that have been provided.

• Based on the information that has been evaluated to this point, classes will continue as scheduled and UA will maintain normal operations. Faculty members are encouraged to work with students who present specific or unique concerns.

• The student in the advisory sent earlier this afternoon about the off-campus incident admitted to investigators that the incident she described did not occur. The investigation into this case has been closed.
• The fire alarm in Presidential Village was due to a sensor that was activated by a non-fire event.
• There was no machete with a note on the door of a fraternity.
• No shots were fired at Presidential Village.
• The FBI is not on campus, and did not conduct a raid in Paty Hall.
• No one dressed as the Joker was in Tutwiler or on sorority row.
• There was not a man on sorority row with a box tied to him in a threatening manner.
• No one was shot and no one has been arrested.
• No students were choked on the Quad or anywhere else.

Students who have concerns about their safety are encouraged to go to myBama and to sign up for Rave Guardian, an app that will immediately alert UAPD if a student becomes concerned about his/her safety.

The second email came a day later, Tuesday, from our senate president:

Dear Faculty Member,

Yesterday was a very difficult one for many students and their families. We saw the boom-eranging of social media rumors compounding rumors. I believe the administration was responding with immediacy to each of these claims. This was unlike anything seen in memory at the university. I met three young students walking into Gorgas early yesterday morning. They were afraid to go to class. Many are confused and anxious by what has happened. And their parents are anxious. As a faculty member you are the most direct link [to] our students at The University of Alabama. Please take the temperature of your classes over the next couple days. If it is appropriate this may be a teachable moment and a time for discussion. I would ask you to be particularly sensitive to the student experience at this moment. In Faculty Senate we are working so that all students are treated equally and with respect. I know you do so in every class, but please wrap your arms around all our students today. Thank you.

The third email appeared on Thursday, again from the campus police alert account:

Despite rumors currently circulating on social media, no arrests have been made in the initial social media post investigation. The individual whose photo appears on the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff’s Office website is not connected to UAPD’s investigation.

Earlier this evening, in an unrelated matter, UAPD talked to an individual who was seen wearing a Halloween mask. After interviewing this person, officers determined that the individual had no ill intent.

So here again, differentiating between fact and fiction—locating the inconsistencies and non-realities of select circumstances—becomes, to a great degree, a bemusing practice; and at this point it seems all we might do is laugh. These examples, of course, might be read according to how efficient particular hysteria could be. Though I do not want to unnecessarily make light of the social anxiety that these emails reveal—or was it provoke?—I do want to point to their collective
The first email signals a rather abrupt shift from updates on search warrants and fire alarms to discussions of a machete, the FBI, the Joker, and suicide bombers before pointing to an app—*Rave Guardian*—that allows one to communicate one’s safety concerns with the push of a button (indeed, after reading this email with its alarming bullet list I nearly downloaded the app and employed its function from my office chair—the email made me feel anxious). The second email points to the social stress of such rumors—students afraid to go to class—even as it distances such events from any collective history: “This was unlike anything seen in memory at the university.” (Keep in mind, this is the University of Alabama—there have certainly been some rather threatening events on our fair campus over the decades). Lastly, the third email re-emphasizes the potential dangers of the unknown—and the absurd notion that a student in a Halloween mask requires a police bulletin.

Together, these emails might point to a strategy of “massive transparency”—revealing all the falsities that, I think anyway, *increase* a collectively endured affect of anxiety even as they fail to intervene in social circumstance in any real way. Reveal some events as false and newly “true” events take their place. Though incidents involving a machete, the FBI, and the Joker might never have happened, *Rave Guardian* exists as a technology to employ should I encounter, perhaps, a student in a Halloween mask or, to push it further, any student in distress (or distressing). This app exists as a protection against what has yet to happen, what might be imagined to happen in the future. Note here the ease with which the momentum of social anxiety might serve as a governing check, one that perhaps coerces one into a stance of securitization, of protecting oneself against an unknown (though seemingly probable) threat. Such elements make up the principles of what Foucault (2010) termed *governmentality*.

Our contemporary neoliberal moment asks us to hold multiple truths and corresponding anxieties in productive tension. Further, we are meant to encounter such anxiety without raising the alarm of abnormal function, of an inability to remain (economically) productive in the face of such circumstances. We can be anxious, just not overly so—download the *Rave Guardian* app but do not overuse it. In short, we are meant to endure the schizo-society of multiple truths but remain unphased by the inevitable contradictions that develop from such contexts. Importantly, we have come to desire these contradictory formations—developing satisfaction from nearly reconciling...

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14. Upon reading an early draft of this article a colleague asked that I include a full description of the events that precipitated these emails to help the reader understand the broader circumstance behind these emails (this concern was echoed by an anonymous reviewer). While I am sympathetic to the desire for a somewhat “complete” narrative, I think it important to note that all three emails assume that the reader understands their context or can otherwise offer the essential origins that precipitated their construction. Oblivious faculty member that I am, these emails left me mystified. I could not ground them in any contextual reality. As such, they existed for me as what Deleuze (1990) might term *partial objects*, lacking any totalizable unity, or *paradoxical objects* as they signal that there is meaning yet never stand in for the meaning itself. Further, in this case there exist no complete or full narrative. There are only attempts to clarify a non-narrative, or the assertion of what did not happen. The point, I believe, is that these attempts to simultaneously claim some truth (this did happen) and deny others (this never happened) result in circumstances of rather profound absurdity. Such absurd circumstances interest me at this point in time.

15. As a small digression, technologies such as the *Race Guardian* app exist as a “protective” mechanism against an ill-defined or otherwise ambiguous future threat. This technology is thus different than, for example, the fire extinguisher under my kitchen sink. Though there may be other uses, the fire extinguisher exists as a protectant against a fire in my kitchen—a rather specifically-inclined technology. *Rave Guardian* exists simply as a means to communicate feeling unsafe, however the user defines that scenario. Thus, *Rave Guardian* exemplifies a technology meant to act in relation to one’s affective state, offering to alert others to one’s lack of security.
them, from nearly (though certainly never fully) making them coexist without much visible friction. Given such circumstance, how are we to engage in a renewed sense of critical work and to what end?

**Parrhesia, Democracy, and Rhetoric**  
**or**  
**The Guests Enter & The Meal Is Served**

In response to the contemporary limitations inherent in foregrounding contradiction or falsity in one’s critical work, I next offer Foucault’s articulation of *parrhesia* as a useful mechanism for intervening in normalizing discourse.¹⁶ Loosely translated as “truth-telling,” *parrhesia* refutes rhetorical moves to dismiss truth through collapsing the disappointing distance between truth and belief—one cannot speak truths one does not believe. Indeed, Foucault (2011; 2001) emphasizes two different approaches to *parrhesiastic* practice among the Ancient Greeks that are distinguishable based on their respective orientation to truth and belief: 1) *political parrhesia* (the domain of the rhetorician); and 2) *philosophical parrhesia* (which aligns truth with belief and, as such, extends an ethical positioning within the world). Both *political* and *philosophical parrhesia* play a role in democracy: the former extends from a desire to persuade the populace towards some end, while the latter calls to question the very realities that give sense to everyday democratic practices, thereby asking citizens to act differently towards a possible future. Through *political parrhesia* the rhetorician seeks false democratic action: persuading others to some persuadable end. Conversely, through *philosophical parrhesia* one strives for radical democratic engagement through envisioning a potential means of being and knowing that is yet undetermined. In this way, *philosophical parrhesia* extends from the virtuous position within the world that Foucault and Butler earlier ascribed to critique. It is thus through *philosophical parrhesia* that we might locate critical inquiry practices for social justice.

Democracy requires an engaged populace, one that deliberates on discussions of what is true and what is false. Consequently, the inability to distinguish truth from falsity (or giving equal standing to multiple, contradictory truths, as is the case with the schizo-society) necessarily imperils democracy. Stagnated democracy—consisting of a citizenry paralyzed by the multiplicity of undifferentiated truths—loses any critical possibility: it repeats the same practices, beliefs, and values across time and space, regardless of context. This is the domain of the *political parrhesiast*: recycled truths given new life through coercive articulation. Thus, *political parrhesia* might be shown to cannibalize democracy by enforcing social stagnation and normalizing repetition. In such a scenario there is no room for political projects for deeply-rooted social change; only incremental alterations to what is already seen and known are allowed. In the field of education, *political parrhesia* gives rise to the educational technocrat, and might be deemed a democracy of the past (reforming what already was).¹⁷

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¹⁶. My hope in this section is to give an overview of *parrhesia* as a useful orientation towards truth-telling and as an example of critical work for social change. As such, what follows is a bit of a gloss. For a fuller treatment of *parrhesia*, especially as it relates to social justice inquiry and materialism, see my previous work: Kuntz, 2015.

¹⁷. As an example, see how Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* gave way to Obama’s *Race to the Top*—both educational “reforms” make sense within the “truth” of accountability measures and principles of standardized assessments of content.
However, in the more liberatory sense of philosophical parrhesia truth-telling disrupts normative patterns of being and knowing. Here, telling-the-truth is to recognize the limits of the normalizing status quo and to imagine ways of being otherwise. This is truth-telling as intervention, as critique. As such, democratic activity stems from an engagement with an immediate, yet unfinished now. This is to provoke a democracy of the immediate now, risking truths that require change. Through philosophical parrhesia the democracy of the immediate now is productively disrupted towards a yet-to-be-realized future.

It is, however, strikingly easy to be persuaded by the skilled rhetorician who employs political parrhesia, to become enamored with a reformation of the democracy of the past. For the political parrhesiast there is no coincidence of truth with belief: it doesn’t matter what you believe, it doesn’t matter if you believe what you say, what matters is that you persuade your audience. If the audience is persuaded, you might be said to have spoken a truth.

What follows next is an example of political truth-telling that incorporates historical memory as a rhetorical skill to concretize select truths—of social progress, of the inevitability of productive change—that are far from interventions into the normative status quo. During the fall of 2013 the University of Alabama had a bit of trouble with its sorority system—it was shown to make pledge decisions based on race. Though the racial segregation of the university Greek system was not news (or was, rather, old news) it became of interest because of the blatant ways in which race was used to reject a well-regarded African-American pledge from a historically all-white sorority. I am not going to get in to the details of the actual instances of racist recruitment policies—readers can do that on their own—but I am interested in the rather bemusing response of our university president, a rhetorical response of truth-telling that looks increasingly absurd with the passage of time.

In recognition of the international attention brought to Tuscaloosa as a result of the systematic racial prejudice of the campus Greek system, President Bonner released a carefully choreographed series of online videos wherein she articulated the progressive action of the university to reframe the racist and segregated Greek system as we know it into a narrative of inevitable racial equality and community harmony. In particular, one video—released the morning of September 17th, 2013—stands out from the rest due to the absurdly rhetorical nature of its contents and the misalignment of assumed history and meaning-making; all very bemusing to say the least. In this particular video President Bonner linked what she termed the “carefully scripted scene” of Wallace’s 1963 Stand in the Schoolhouse Door, John F. Kennedy’s famous civil rights address to the nation that same night, and the university’s determination to integrate the sorority system some 50 years later—and she did it all in four minutes and 21 seconds. These are three decidedly scripted events—the stand, the speech, and now the video—and each remains entangled in public memory, cultural norms, and questions of truth.

In her video, Bonner raises the issue of segregation as a question of truth—she notes that the university was working to “determine what the barriers were—whether they were real or perceived” in order to produce a plan of action.18 As such, President Bonner offers a question of reality vs. perception, and that perception—or reality—is of the notion of barriers, as she later states, “we will remove any barriers that they [the pledge members] perceive.” Here perception is in the foreground—you perceive it and we shall remove it. There is thus a rhetorical collapse of truth with perception. If it is perceived it must be true (and thus removed).19 Rhetorically, we might surmise that if we change the perception—that pledges perceive barriers—then we change

18. All quotations are from a direct transcript of the video itself.
19. How very postmodern of her.
the reality that there are barriers; odd, that. But then it gets odder as the video extends to link a productive history of progressive change with a prescribed future of necessary (and inevitable) advancement. Given recent events—happenings that could not have been anticipated by President Bonner—the video becomes patently absurd and, it seems, one can only laugh uncomfortably at the strangeness of it all. The image below is a still-shot from the video.²⁰

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

After making a stand to change barriers—or was it perception?—the video shifts to a montage of scripted candid shots of Bonner with…Bill Cosby. Now, to be fair, this is Cosby before the public outcry against a litany of rape charges—this is the good natured, Jello-Pudding Pop, Kids Say the Darndest Things, gentle father Cosby. And, if you look closely, the (in)famous comedian is wearing a shirt that says “Property Of Alabama Football.” Such circumstance strikes one as laugh out loud funny even as it remains incredibly disturbing. Since the airing of the video, of course, Cosby has refused to answer allegations of rape on National Public Radio, continued his comedy tour, and been confronted by dozens of women who allege he drugged and raped them over an extended number of years. What are we to do with these multiple truths, all hanging side-by-side? What are we to do, but remain anxiously bemused by such absurdity? Just to review, we have a documented case of historical segregation in a Greek system at the University of Alabama. The president responds with a pledge to remove perceived barriers, invoking George Wallace, JFK, and Bill Cosby to do so. To make things wonderfully worse, Bonner concludes the video by quoting an exchange with Cosby that (scripted) night:

As he took his seat at the head of the table, [Cosby] commented:

“In 1955, when I crossed the color barrier and began my career in the entrainment industry, I could not have dreamed sitting at the head of the table in the President’s Mansion at the University of Alabama, with the first woman president.”

I commented back to Mr. Cosby,

“During the last fifty years since two brave students walked through the schoolhouse door, The University of Alabama has made so much progress, but clearly, we still have so much further to go.”

Mr. Cosby looked at me and said,

“Please do not think about how far you have to go. Think about the steps that you are going to take in order to get there.”

Such a delightfully non-scripted moment of connection, between the university president with the southern drawl and the African-American entertainer in the “property of” t-shirt. The online video has since been removed; I cannot imagine why.

What the entanglement of the video, representational histories, and forced celebration of social progression provoke in me is amazement at how easily absurdity aligns or rubs up against the most common of sense without undo friction or anxiety—-it just is there, we watch the movies and move on. In many ways the practice of everyday living is one that meets such apparent discontinuity with a practiced shrug.

And what of the protests? Entangled in Wallace’s Stand, Kennedy’s speech, and Bonner’s video were a series of campus protests. As history folds unto itself protestors responded to revelations of the sorority incident by virtually re-inacting the 1963 stand itself—a march was organized to the administration building where the president met the marchers, shaking hands for a delightful photo-op. Thus, the sorority protest enfolds within the social memory of Wallace's stand, the pictures overlay as nearly identical: the administrator (then Governor Wallace, now University President Bonner) stands at the doors to a building, surrounded by protestors (then protesting integration, now protesting segregation)—virtualized repetition at its finest. This, I suppose, is the cycle of past and present, perhaps even future, that Deleuze (1995) deemed "coexistent cycles of being." As Deleuze notes, such coexistent cycles extend from representative systems—the machine renders a reality, a knowing, that can be known, understood according to its own sense-making. Thus there is an odd sense of history here—the contemporary racist event enveloped within the celebration of the historical post-event of the Stand. It’s a non-history history. It is thus not all that amazing that such repetition folds in on itself—repetition plays out and is called progress.

There are many ways to read this, but for the moment, let us foreground how public memory was invoked to shore-up an administrative response on my campus and, well, failed in rather spectacular ways. It might be said to have failed in the moment of calling back or recalling a shared public memory—that is, it just did not work in the ways perhaps intended (hence the video’s removal from the public domain)—but it certainly might now be said to have failed rather spectacularly given the distance of time (that is, when we fold an individually-felt collective memory—Wallace’s stand—on a recent happening—sorority segregation—and understand it through a few extended contemporary moments—Cosby at dinner with the president, Cosby refusing to discuss rape on NPR).

21. At the time of this writing, interested viewers can access the entire video through an attachment to this blog post: http://blog.al.com/tuscaloosa/2013/09/university_of_alabama_presiden.html.
This enfolding of public memory is often found on college campuses when some historical truth is called forth in the hopes of framing a more progressive contemporary time—one that learned from the events of the past in order to better operate and negotiate the vagaries of race, say, or class inequality. Sometimes this calling forth of public memory provides a useful ground upon which some community might come together—other times it disintegrates and we see not how far we have come, but how quickly we have redoubled back to where we were some odd years ago. This is akin to the politician who claims that he has made a “360 degree change” and is thus a newly made man. Public memory might thus be understood rhetorically, insofar as it attempts to preserve and reproduce particular understandings of the past to shape our understandings of the present and the future. As a result, public memory not only preserves shared understanding of the past, but also those conflicts about how exactly the past should be represented in the present—the coming together of the past in the present; an unfolding. So, in the Bonner example, we have public memory as a political tool, a means for engaging in political parrhesia.

Unlike political parrhesia, philosophical parrhesia points to a different type of disruption to normative political functioning within a democracy. Whereas political parrhesia perhaps leads to rhetorical interventions aimed at producing a social change that persuades select groups to think alike (and, further, follow-alike, hence the advent of fascism), philosophical parrhesia makes available a type of civic disobedience that derives from the very linkage of belief and truth-telling. Through the coincidence of truth with belief, the philosophical truth-teller risks his/her positioning in relation to others, destabilizing one’s citizenship within a community. Thus it is that the truth-teller is in an unsettled position, one without predetermined ends.

**Reclaiming Truth-Telling in Methodological Practice: Parrhesiastic Work or**

**The Post-Meal Cigarette**

Because I am not ready to foreclose on the notion of truth-telling, I find it useful to consider educational inquiry alongside Foucault’s notion of philosophical parrhesia. In this way, I seek next to situate critical approaches to inquiry as a type of parrhesiastic work. To be clear, I do not believe that there is any way to fully match parrhesia as enacted during the time of the Ancient Greeks with contemporary manifestations of educational inquiry; a one-to-one correspondence is not my aim. Instead, I want to consider parrhesia as an approach to living, being, and knowing the world differently—more productively—than we have traditionally and the implications that such a shift might have for those of us who take seriously the goals and aims of critical inquiry practice.

For Foucault, philosophical parrhesia extends from an orientation towards the world that is never complete; it always starts all over again. Thus philosophical parrhesia is an ontological positioning, one that extends from an ethical principal of insubordination to the coercive governing of the present. In this way, the philosophical parrhesiast seeks to transform the relations of which s/he is a part—the telling of truths makes possible an ongoing array of relational possibilities (some anticipated, perhaps, some not) and, as a consequence, is an intervention into the reproduction of standardized meaning. The parrhesiast never fully knows—never could fully know—the outcome of truth-telling and, as such, each parrhesiastic activity carries with it some degree of (productive) risk.

Whereas those who might inhabit the position of the political parrhesiast (or the rhetorician) often have little hesitancy when it comes to assertions of some truth (whether it be historically
“known,” individually felt, or both), contemporary academic theory often refuses to acknowledge the term truth for fear of essentializing or pre-determining the processes or concepts of which they speak. This seems strikingly apparent in educational scholarship that claims the critical mantle. “Critical” scholars seem all-too-easy with refusals of any truth and it is perhaps time to revisit this stance of non-truth in favor of truth-based assertions that extend from a determination to imagine ourselves as other than we are. Though I certainly understand the desire to resist foreclosing meaning to some fixed position, I remain concerned about the costs of such a move. And, I certainly am not ready to cede the role of truth-telling to the rhetoricians. Indeed, there exists the very real consequence that an ongoing determination to fixate on non-truths (the contradiction discovery tactics of “critical scholars”) actually enables a rhetorically-based production of multiple truths competing for visibility. We moved away from philosophical truth-telling to such a degree that we have achieved a type of inquiry-induced paralysis—we’ve no truths upon which to act (or a landscape of multiple, overdetermined truths, the multiplicity of which makes it impossible for us to act). Educational scholars intent on progressive social change cannot remove themselves from the consequences of such circumstances. We need to think, act, and live differently, according to new conceptions of responsibility and risk. Indeed, given our present day schizoid society, I find it all the more important that critical scholars risk practices of truth-telling and do so as a means of philosophical parrhesia.

The philosophical parrhesiastic orientation towards truth decidedly counters the tired hesitancy that has come to predominate the liberal world of inquiry work. Further, such truth-telling might usefully extend from a position of productive bemusement, laughing at the absurdity of truths given equal standing without much recourse even as we strive to intervene, critically, in their overproduction. In some ways, the schizo-society offers the critical scholar the opportunity to ask from the bemused position, as Foucault does, “How is it that meaning could be had out of nonsense” (1997, p. 53). What has coerced this meaning to ordered visibility in such absurd circumstances?

Perhaps what critical scholars must do is run the risk of becoming deformed subjects22—this is the risk inherent to philosophical parrhesia: one risks the deformation of one’s identity. Butler (2001) terms this type of work “ethical labor” from an “ontologically insecure position”—critical practices that risk one’s own subject-formation and, as such, disrupt the politics of norms. Perhaps that is what our bemused status calls forth—we can no longer operate within structures of logical order—the rules have bent in absurd patterns. Like Alice in Wonderland, there is no rational means for tracing the patterns of logic that inform our contemporary moment. As such, we must develop a stance of bemused criticality—laughing at the absurdity of truth aligned with truth even as we locate the interstices where new formations might begin, where we might take a stance of belief that orients our work towards an unrealized, unimaginable, future. Critical faculty work, then, becomes moral work—the determination to intervene in neoliberal processes and practices because their incessant reproduction is unjust. And, one intervenes not because one has determined a progressive future but, instead, because one is determined to no longer be coerced by the seductions of neoliberal governing; the costs of such circumstances are simply not tolerable.

22. In some way, I align here with Ben Baez (2014) who alludes to the importance of miscalculating ourselves given the problematics of our contemporary “information age.”
Bibliography


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**From Charity to Equity: Race, Homelessness, & Urban Schools**

By Ann Aviles de Bradley


Reviewed by Amy E. Stich, Northern Illinois University

**Abstract**

This review of *From Charity to Equity: Race, Homelessness, & Urban Schools* examines Ann Aviles de Bradley’s ethnographic account of homeless educational policy in an age of colorblindness. As argued by the reviewer, this book is a powerful example of the ways in which ethnographic research allows for a “bottom-up,” social justice approach that can project the voices of those most affected but least heard. As a collective, these voices call attention to larger systemic issues and stand to challenge the voices that dominate policy discourse and decision-making—those that are often most disconnected from everyday life within classrooms and schools.

**Keywords:** urban education; homelessness; educational policy; race

**Homeless Educational Policy in an Age of Colorblindness**

**Introduction**

Despite a more recent series of tragic, “color-coded” events that have forced public attention toward issues of race and racism, the dominant narrative is largely one of denial, avoidance and distortion—what Bonilla-Silva (2010) and others have called “colorblind racism.” This persistent and all-pervasive form of systemic racism “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (p. 2). Rising poverty and homelessness, particularly among children and youth of color (Grusky et al., 2004), increasing levels of residential and school segregation (Orfield et al., 2015), significant gaps in educational access, opportunity, achievement and attainment, and the fact that there are “more African-Americans under correctional control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850” (Alexander, 2013, p. 180), provide overwhelming evidence of this “new racism,” wherein these and other significant racial disparities are argued away, often by well-meaning individuals, as having nothing at all to do with race.

Under this ideological scaffold, educational policies that seek to “leave no child behind” often function instead to deepen racial (and intersecting class-based) disparities. For example, although Black students are overrepresented among homeless youth in large urban centers, those who implement the McKinney-Vento Act, which aims to provide access to services and support for
homeless youth, largely ignore race as a factor that influences how and to what extent this policy will be implemented. But, as Aviles de Bradley (2015) writes:

The racialization process that exists in the United States permeates all social structures, policies, and daily interactions; therefore, it is critical to highlight the ways in which race plays an implicit and explicit role in McKinney-Vento policy or homeless educational policy (HEP). (p. 13)

Thus begins the author’s thought-provoking, textual march towards social justice.

**Overview of From Charity to Equity**

The first several pages of *From Charity to Equity* provide valuable context for the author’s ethnographic account of homeless youth of color within two Chicago public schools. In those pages, we are introduced to the scope of homelessness for children and youth within the US and in hyper-segregated Chicago Public Schools, and in particular: the complexity of what it means to be a homeless student; the educational policy meant to reduce barriers for these students (McKinney-Vento); and the lens through which the author examines the experiences and perspectives of students and school staff relative to homeless educational policy (Critical Race Theory). In these pages, we are made aware of the significant number of homeless children and youth within the US (approximately 1.6 million as estimated by The National Center on Family Homelessness) and the complexity of what it means to be an unaccompanied homeless student confronting the overwhelming obstacles stacked against this population (e.g., greater risk of abuse, homicide, suicide, illness, and mental health problems, issues of access to health care, and so forth).

The McKinney-Vento Act was introduced in the late eighties as a first effort to reduce access barriers and ensure greater stability for homeless students. But, as the author writes, “It has been 20 years since McKinney-Vento was first signed into law, yet many homeless students are still denied access to, and enrollment in, schools due to their status as homeless and based on their inability to provide records (e.g. furnishing a permanent address, immunization records), in direct disregard of the law” (2015, p. 7). Although Aviles de Bradley agrees that policy implementation is a serious concern relative to the effectiveness of McKinney-Vento, the author’s close attention to race and class (racism and classism) as significant social barriers to education is arguably the book’s greatest contribution. Though the author recognizes the complex intersection of race and class in perpetuating poverty and homelessness, she also notes that all too often homeless educational policy and those who facilitate its implementation neglect race while focusing solely on economic inequality, despite statistics that remind us of the socially and structurally embedded nature of racism (e.g., the majority of homeless youth within Chicago Public Schools are students of color; schools are more segregated today than in 1968, see Orfield et al., 2014). In order to position race solidly at the center of this research, the author examines McKinney-Vento using Critical Race Theory, thereby challenging the colorblind nature of our social institutions and the policies that govern them.

The author places the bulk of the book’s content on the voices of students and school- and community-based adults in chapters two and three, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of those who facilitate the implementation of homeless educational policy (school staff, etc.) and those who are most affected (homeless students). In chapter two, we are introduced to the obstacles, challenges and triumphs of six individual, unaccompanied, homeless youth of color: John,
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Natalie, Sheila, Jack, Michael and Leon. Each individual account offers a thick, ethnographic description of the student’s biography, including their current living situation, and their experiences and perspectives relative to McKinney-Vento. These individual stories are laced with a critical analysis of race and reveal the ways in which the experiences of homeless students are deeply racialized.

Chapter three examines levels of awareness, understanding and accountability of school-assigned homeless liaisons, counselors, social workers and teachers, among other school staff. While adult voices reveal serious resource and support issues (e.g., lack of sufficient training and time to devote to their roles as liaisons) that work against the effective implementation of homeless educational policy, these voices also perpetuate the racialized context of the schools wherein McKinney-Vento plays out through colorblindness and charitable approaches to homelessness. These individual voices reflect deeper systemic issues relative to race and class: “…it is not their individual acts that limit access for unaccompanied homeless youth of color, but the larger system that views students of color in a particular way” (2015, p. 87). The final chapter considers specific policy implications that may help to move us away from a charity-based approach to homelessness, toward one that is equitable and justice-oriented. Based upon this research, the author's suggestions are concrete and logical, but as she importantly ends, we cannot assess or examine McKinney-Vento outside of the larger contextual factors that shape and influence not just the degree to which policy is implemented, but how this policy is implemented within active systems of oppression.

As we read the stories of unaccompanied homeless youth, the author asks that we “resist” feelings of sympathy and rather work to provide “stability, respect, educational access, and an educational system that honors and supports their efforts to remain engaged in school and reach their fullest potential” (2015, p. ix). This requires critical work and movement away from the popular deficit approach that pathologizes homeless youth in general, and homeless youth of color in particular.

**Why You Should Read From Charity to Equity**

This book is a powerful example of the ways in which ethnographic research allows for a “bottom-up,” social justice approach that can project the voices of those most affected but least heard (Dimitriadis, 2015). These voices stand to challenge those that dominate policy discourse and decision-making—ironically, those who are often most disconnected from everyday life within classrooms and schools. This book is timely, as educational policy continues to demonstrate a limited interest in the voices of youth, particularly marginalized youth. While the author examines individual experiences, her approach reveals fault lines within the larger social system, challenging popular narratives surrounding the “failures” of individuals or particular groups (students, parents, teachers, administrators). Indeed, despite students’ ambitions, hard work, perseverance and resilience, these stories are not those projected by media outliers that reinforce a meritocratic ideology (e.g., Liz Murray’s journey from homeless to Harvard). As evidenced within this book, the structural obstacles for many homeless youth of color, including inequality of access and opportunity under policies created to reduce/eliminate those barriers, are just too great.

When I finished From Charity to Equity, I was deeply impressed by the care with which Aviles de Bradley presented voices with depth, authenticity, autonomy and clarity—all the while emphasizing the larger structural inequalities within which they live. However, this book, in all of its sincerity, smart edges, sound theoretical framework, and moments of thick ethnographic description, was all too brief. This is not as much a critique of the book as it is of the neoliberal
climate within which we all “produce.” Although this book examines urban schools and educational policy, the author herself, as a member of the academic community, works under the very same neoliberal moon. The same neoliberalism that arguably drives educational policy and reform has led to public disinvestment in urban schools, is buttressed by a colorblind ideology (Lipman, 2011), and shapes our own scholarship in significant ways. Even as we work with great criticality, as the author has done, academia and academic publishing are subject to a seemingly inescapable neoliberal regime that has intensified production and competition and values quantification and efficiency over the timely, elaborated nature of serious intellectual work. This presents a particular threat to qualitative methodologies and ethnography in particular. However, neoliberalism is neither impervious nor immune to dismantling and must be challenged in conjunction with other oppressive discourses and systems that function to reproduce inequality under the guise of democracy.

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Blame Teachers: The Emotional Reasons for Educational Reform
By Steven P. Jones

Reviewed by Jarrett Neal, Aurora University

Abstract

Cultural shifts over the last half century have left educators vulnerable to myriad attacks from the public, politicians, and corporate entities. Battles over the means, methods, and efficacy of education, which manifest in debates over curriculum, funding, and assessments, limit and in some cases imperil educators’ efforts to facilitate learning. Jones (2015) levels reasoned, insightful criticisms at those who seek to restrict teachers’ praxes and abolish protections such as tenure which allow them to carry out research and expand pedagogy. The author’s useful text staunchly defends the teaching profession and exposes the mendacity of education leaders such as Arne Duncan and the detrimental effect neoliberalism has had on the profession, primarily in charter schools. The text behooves educators and those preparing to enter the field to guard themselves against cultural and political threats to the profession and to decode the language used to vilify and dismantle education in its truest sense.

Keywords: neoliberalism, charter schools, Knowledge is Power (KIPP) schools, multiculturalism

A sardonic two-panel comic strip has been making its way around the internet for several years now. Anyone who works in education or maintains a close relationship with someone who does has undoubtedly seen it and has formed an opinion regarding the stark difference between the contrasting images. The first panel, illustrated in desaturated colors, is set in 1969. In it, a mother and father peer down at their child with stern expressions and demand that he gives them an explanation for the deplorable grades he has earned in school; behind them the child’s teacher, a stereotypically authoritative and austere schoolmarm, sits bolt upright in her desk chair and awaits a response, along with the parents, from the ineffectual pupil, who cowers in a corner. This was an era, readers are meant to infer, when parents and teachers were united in their aim to educate and instruct students; an era where the standards of academe and the desires of the community were indistinguishable and all learners at all levels knew implicitly that they alone were responsible for their success or failure in school. Teachers gloried in their autonomy and their talents were never to be second guessed: they knew best. Poor grades were an ignoble smudge on a student’s parents
and those parents’ ability to properly prepare and discipline their children for the rigors of education.

Yet the colorful panel to the right expresses an altogether different ethos. Set in the here and now, the same cast of characters—mother, father, child, teacher—occupy the same space (the classroom), yet the sentiment expressed here obliterates the virtues esteemed in the first panel. This time the disapproving parents train their wrathful gaze upon a young, harried, moist-eyed teacher and demand that she “Explain these bad grades!” while their child, a smug little scamp, beams with unearned pride. What is missing from this cartoon is the historical gap between 1969 and the present day, years which saw the rise of identity politics, multiculturalism, economic booms and busts, and a spectrum of national crises, the sum total of which recalibrated the standards and aims of education. No longer do teachers and the public accord in their mission to educate society. While most teachers uphold the principle that education is lifelong and should prepare learners for full engagement with civic life, the public demands measurable assessments, ones that directly translate to career and financial stability for all and a presumption that if students don’t reach those goals, the blame can be placed squarely at the feet of the nation’s teachers.

Once seen as the great equalizer of society, education in the twenty-first century has now become a battleground for a host of societal tensions. Teachers, once esteemed by the citizenry, now find themselves the target of myriad assaults based on little more than an aggravated society’s need to pinpoint exactly when the nation’s quality of education began to decline and what that decline can be attributed to. Steven P. Jones, author of the book *Blame Teachers: The Emotional Reasons for Educational Reform* thrusts himself into the fray between teachers and both the public and policymakers who wish to scapegoat teachers for society’s ills. Jones (2015) finds that the contract between educators and the populace, once built on mutual trust and respect, has devolved into a war over curriculum, values, compensation, and assessments. Jones (2015) accurately surmises that the battles currently being waged over education signify “righteous indignation coming from both sides in this educational debate [and] clearly signals a felt violation of something deeply held” (p. 15). At its core, the fight over education is indeed a protracted argument over cultural values and cultural identity, one that has been co-opted by corporations and special interest groups to further their own agenda. Informed readers will approach *Blame Teachers* with this idea already in mind. Yet for the uninformed reader, Jones takes what may be little more than a gut feeling and, like any skilled debater, parses the language and exhibitions of adversaries until their claims fall apart.

A reasoned, impassioned polemic, *Blame Teachers* utilizes eight chapters (one hundred fifty-four pages total) to make its case. Jones (2015) incorporates current events, cultural criticism, and politics in this defense of the teaching profession, providing educators the arsenal they need to defend themselves against charges of indolence, ineptitude, and inadequacy. Far more frequently, however, teachers find themselves on the losing end of these battles. Jones claims that the constant calls for reforms and the implementation of programs such as *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* demonstrate society’s view that “teachers need to be managed, watched over, held accountable, and pressured to perform” (p. 40). Like many educators, Jones takes umbrage with critics who see educators as impediments to learning rather than its facilitators and utilizes his book to expose their own avaricious activities. By doing so he brings to the fore a cultural debate over what real learning is, how it can best be accomplish, and by what means and metrics it should be measured. Recognizing that standardized test scores and other quantifiable measures are woefully inaccurate reflections of student learning, *Blame Teachers* argues that such assessments limit teachers’ effectiveness and, most importantly, undermines true learning.
Jones (2015) levels his most pointed criticism at former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. As the emissary of the Obama administration’s education, principally embodied by Obama’s *Race to the Top* initiative, Jones takes Duncan to task for extolling and promoting a vision of teachers as diffident employees who have somehow lost the zeal to adequately mold young minds, as vain, self-interested layabouts who would rather hasten the decline of learning in the United States than sacrifice themselves and their many “perks” (among them summer vacations, pensions, and tenure) to reform the system. Indeed, Secretary Duncan’s remarks echo the sentiments of many lawmakers who opine that teachers have become softened by protections such as tenure, and only by dismantling those protections, including teachers unions and pensions, can academe get back to true educating. Yet Jones argues that teachers routinely sacrifice their time and work exhaustively to make sure students learn. A teacher’s value and efforts extends far beyond the activities confined within an average school day: teachers at all levels work tirelessly and rigorously and at times must step outside of their role to support their students in ways their families and friends cannot. Nevertheless, the notion that teachers’ ineffectiveness is clearly manifest in students’ lack of ability signifies the depth to which neoliberalism has infiltrated education.

Neoliberalism and its ancillary impact on education at all levels, Jones (2015) attests, bears a great deal of responsibility for the quandary teachers presently find themselves in. The idea that schools should be run and operated like businesses, and teachers should be forced to demonstrate their effectiveness through their students’ test scores or suffer loss of wages or employment, has created a system in which traditional learning is now seen met with hostility by the public. Also, the neoliberal model of education, embodied by Knowledge is Power (KIPP) schools and charter schools, Jones (2015) finds, squanders the talent and expertise of veteran teachers while simultaneously exploiting neophyte teachers’ lack of gravitas and eagerness to succeed. Jones (2015) sees a system in which students are rewarded for learning very little and teachers are punished for knowing or expecting too much.

*Blame Teachers*’ strength lies in its clear, strong voice and Jones’ focused arguments. Whether this book will reach the eyes of the individuals who vilify teachers and their profession remains a mystery. Like so many texts of its sort, *Blame Teachers*, despite its deft prose, steely arguments, and undeniable reverence for teachers and the hard work they do, may fail to move beyond its imbedded readership of educators—its amen chorus. Nevertheless, a thorough reading of this text would greatly benefit anyone wishing to undertake a career in education. This book will inspire dynamic conversations in both undergraduate and graduate level education courses.

**Reference**


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