

VOLUME 9: ISSUE 1

The Sophist's Bane

A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSORS OF EDUCATION

REFUSING THE RETURN: MOBILIZING TOWARD JUST EDUCATIONAL FUTURES

— SPECIAL EDITION —

Guest Editors
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A Journal of the Society of Professors of Education (SPE)

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The Sophist's Bane is the refereed scholarly journal of The Society of Professors of Education. The Society was founded in 1902 when the National Society of College Teachers of Education was first formed in cooperation with the National Education Association. Among its early presidents were Charles DeGarmo and John Dewey. The Society is an interdisciplinary, professional, and academic association open to all persons, both theoreticians and practitioners, engaged in teacher preparation or related activities. Its purpose is to serve the diverse needs and interests of the education professoriate. The Society's primary goal is to provide a forum for consideration of major issues, tasks, problems, and challenges confronting professional educators. Additional information about the Society, *The Sophist's Bane*, and its sister publication, *Professing Education*, can be found at the SPE website: <http://societyofprofessorsofeducation>.

THE SOPHIST'S BANE

“Can you tell me, Socrates, is virtue teachable?”

Meno asks this question to Socrates in Plato's dialogue, *Meno*, and begins a conversation about universals, teaching, knowledge, and more. Central to understanding Meno's role in the dialogue is his motivation for asking the question in the first place. Simply put, Meno wanted an answer to his question. Further, he wanted Socrates to give him the answer. Quickly. As a sophist, Meno demonstrates a posture and a way of being that are antithetical to searches for wisdom. Sophists reach only for simple answers and how-to applications with the least amount of thinking, arguing, or searching possible. A sophist's bane is to be faced with questions that may not be easily answered. A sophist's bane is to have to think deeply and critically and take the meandering paths associated with complex problems – ones that often are inefficient and unplanned. A sophist's bane is to read articles and essays that discard oversimplifications and champion inquiry simply because it is worth doing.

The Sophist's Bane. The editors have created a forum for a broad array of professors of education that serves as a means through which thinkers can challenge assumptions, delve deeply into complex topics, and not be worried about neatly packaged “answers.” While attempting to counteract superficiality and formulaic approaches to inquiry and research, this journal nonetheless intends to be accessible to those who may be outside formal academic settings.

In keeping with the unique title of this journal, articles within it will raise a wide variety of questions that are linked to an even wider variety of topics. What distinguishes this journal from others, however, is that it is not intending easy answers or efficient maps for solving problems. Identifying and exploring questions, reaching beyond the perfunctory narratives, and making arguments that challenge rather than assuage the Meno's of the modern world – these are the foci for *The Sophist's Bane*. A more worthy initiative is beyond imagination.

Deron R. Boyles
Georgia State University

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Refusing the Return: Mobilizing Toward Just Educational Futures

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As we embarked on the task of preparing the 2023 Society of Professors of Education (SPE) annual gathering, we were struck by the liminality of the moment. The early days of the 2022 academic year were fraught with the lingering and continually accumulating residue of the pandemic. Our campuses, though desiring to return to the days before, remained marked by empty corridors and office suites, Zoom boxes and reluctantly unmasked faculty. The resumption of in-person classes was accompanied by long absences of faculty, staff, and students with vulnerable health circumstances and unlucky positive tests. Many in the wider educational community remained fixated on gaps and deficiencies—the missed benchmarks and student inadequacies—that the pandemic had wrought. All the while, school districts saw the largest federal investment in public education in a generation while teacher unions fought for and won historic gains. And though the resurgence of the movement for racial justice, catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, mobilized so many in our educational community, regressive and repressive discourses and policy provided a swift and powerful backlash, placing much of what was gained at risk. Amidst this climate, the Society of Professors of Education would convene its first in-person gathering of the society in three years.

We sat at Kelli's kitchen counter, grappling with the moment and all that was facing the educational

profession. We considered Ladson-Billings' (2021) call to resist a post-pandemic "return to normal" as we mused on all that the pandemic made visible and urgent; all that the pandemic had forced the profession to confront. Why return to an education system rife with institutional and personalized racisms, anti-blackness, and Othering shrouded by white supremacist ideals and structural inequities? The issues and contradictions within the institution of schooling, in the United States and globally, had been laid bare. Within that, there was possibility; an educational ethos of potential change. What could a hard re-set, as Ladson-Billings' (2021) argued was required, look like and how might the Society of Professors of Education take up this charge?

What better place to contend with these questions than the Society of Professors of Education's annual gathering. SPE was founded in 1902 to provide a forum for those actively engaged in teacher preparation, curriculum studies, and educational foundations work to come together across disciplinary silos to engage with and confront the urgent issues and challenges facing the profession. Founding members included John Dewey, Charles DeGarno and Walter B. Jacobs. In the earliest years of the Society, scholars with diverging scholarly interests and professional practice, such as William Kilpatrick, Harold O. Rugg, Edward L. Thorndike, and George Herbert Mead, cemented the organization's ongoing vision to serve as an

interdisciplinary professional and academic association aimed at examining and contending with the diverse needs and interests of the education professoriate.

Given the deep historical knowledge rooted within this learned community, we wished to forward Ladson-Billings' refusal to the membership: how were we, as the thought-producers of the profession, refusing the pull of the past, unsettling the normative, and reenvisioning the democratic possibilities of education? Standing at this critical juncture, we considered how members of our Society were mobilizing our research and practice to inform the agentic future of education, while also working in solidarity with movements for justice.

In this special issue, we share selected articles presented at the 2023 gathering of the Society of Professors of Education Conference, held in Chicago, Illinois. The issue is framed by the evocative position toward 'refusing the return' (Ladson-Billings, 2021) in Dr. Brian Schultz' Presidential Address. Next, Schoorman and Gatens (2024) undertake a political discourse analysis of Florida's 'divisive concepts' laws, highlighting the disparity between the language of the laws themselves and the pedagogical, curricular, and instructional ramifications of an 'anti-Woke' political discourse. Casey (2024) nuances the theoretical implications of individualism as a tenet of white supremacy culture within schools, parsing out the concept of hyperindividualism as it affects the teaching force. Lastly, Pajak (2024) returns the reader's attention to a post-pandemic educational landscape, offering a conceptual review of established scholarship surrounding the interwoven issues of the racial trauma experienced by Youth of Color, and the anti-racist teaching practices that could abate the racial trauma exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We hope, as an educational community, we are spurred by the scholarship in this special issue to examine our past and present as we look toward socially-just educational futures. These articles are situated within the tenuous moments surrounding the context of the early 2020s, and allow us to envision a way forward. The scholarship within the following pages highlights how educational researchers and theorists nuance the sociopolitical contexts of their work when the local

discursive context is antithetical to critical and anti-oppressive pedagogical understandings toward that work (e.g., Shoorman & Gatens, 2024). It synthesizes the work that has been done to make teaching more equitable while focusing on the futures of the Youth of Color in our schools (e.g., Pajak, 2024). It also gives us entry points to critically examine how we view individuality within a neoliberal landscape that reifies individual actors (Casey, 2024). As Casey (2024) reminds us in his piece, we need to refuse the liberal notion of hyperindividualism, understanding that the individual professor of education is not a disparate entity - we are members of this and other collectives.

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In This Moment, What Will You Do? The SPE President's Address

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In their provocative call for proposals for this 2023 Society of Professors of Education Annual Meeting, professors and program co-chairs Meghan Phadke and Kelli Rushek (2022) prompt us to both resist and reimagine.

Resist notions that we can or ought to return to what is considered normal in a post-pandemic world. Resist an upending of a long-overdue racial justice awakening. Resist the fervent changes to state laws and educational policies that erase histories, invalidate lived experiences, and silence voices—particularly of those people who have been historically marginalized.

Meghan and Kelli's call simultaneously demands that we reimagine. Reimagine what is possible in education and schooling. Reimagine what is right by and for students. Reimagine reciprocal partnerships with communities focused on justice and equity. The call prompts us to re-envision democratic possibilities of and for education. In asking, "how are we activating our research and practice to inform the agentic future of education, while also working in solidarity with movements for justice?" Meghan and Kelli challenge us to rethink, rebuild, and re-do what it is that we, and others, have done before. Invoking Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021), Meghan and Kelli look to her essay as a way to ponder our moment. Ladson-Billings argues that post-pandemic times are an "opportunity to restart, or more precisely re-set" education that works towards "a more robust and culturally centered pedagogy" (p. 68). This seems apropos to the Society's call for re-imagining just educational futures.

My hope is that today, at our annual meeting, this question is wrestled with by those in attendance. What does it look like to mobilize towards just educational futures? What does it mean to resist the return to an

unjust, inequitable status quo? My hope is that through the sessions, talks, ideas, scholarship, and honoring colleagues through various awards, these questions and their inherent shared challenges cause you to reflect and push you to act.

Contemplating an agentic future is difficult at best. Our current moment is a tough one. It is especially trying for those of us who are professors of education. Professors of education, and perhaps professors in general, are being scrutinized, critiqued, and silenced. But we must also, in this moment, acknowledge that as difficult as it is for us, the future teachers we teach and our education program graduates—the educators in P12 classrooms—face myriad complexities that are likely far more daunting, and far more punitive.

Restricted topics. Forbidden content. Banned books. Policies excluding certain texts. Policies mandating certain texts. Regulating how curriculum makes students "feel." Narrow curriculum. Standards. Big-house publishers. High-stakes tests. Disparate impacts. Under-resourced schools. Unfunded mandates. Extrinsic rewards. Punitive evaluations. Don't Say Gay. Anti-CRT. Parental rights. Woke teachers. Indoctrination. Insubordination. Demonization of teachers. Resistance to unionization. Lack of mental health supports. Fewer social workers. Overworked school counselors and school psychologists. And this is just a start...

Then we wonder about the ubiquity of school shootings. And the response to these tragedies: a new commonplace of laws allowing for the arming of teachers; a new school commercialism that focuses the selling of school safety. ALICE drills. FASTER training. Active shooter practices. Surveillance. Panopticons. Panic buttons. Bear spray. Lock boxes. Lockdowns.

And then, we wonder why? Why? Why is there a teacher shortage? Why are there fewer young people wanting to go into teaching? With fewer resources, more demands, decreased safety, and overzealous public scrutiny, we need to stop wondering.

Naming our moment to work towards that future, a just future, is a necessary first step. We can draw on our research. Contemplate and explore the research of others. But, importantly, we must also push towards futures—ideas and actions—that have not yet been named. We need to see what is possible when the current moment is obscuring it. Blocking it. Hiding it. It is in this moment that we must grapple with who we are, what we want—need—to do, and ultimately what actions we are prepared to take, demanding something different, something better. A future that is not yet.

I am reminded of Bill Pinar's (1998) now 25-year-old introduction to his edited volume and tribute to Maxine Greene. In the first pages of *The Passionate Mind of Maxine Greene*, Bill stories a talk that Maxine gave a few years earlier.

In Bill's words:

As she draws near to what feels like the end of the speech, she pauses and looks at us. 'Who am I?' she poses, partly to us, partly to herself. She answers: 'I am who I am not yet.' 'Not yet'... the phrase still hangs in the air around me. Maxine Greene is... not yet. Her own sense of incompleteness, of what is not yet but can be, inspires us to work for a future we can only imagine now (p. 1).

In reading Bill's recollection, I too, am inspired. In the few interactions I had with Maxine at conferences, I always found her to be hopeful despite. Hopeful in spite. Hopeful for what could be. Her words and ideas inspire me to imagine that future, while acknowledging that it is hard, arduous work.

Even amidst the ridiculousness, and the absurdity of the far right's increased mobilization that is restricting us and teachers, we need to embrace the incompleteness of ourselves to push towards a new reality. A different reality. A reality that evokes and invokes justice and equity. We need to imagine educational futures beyond the anti-woke campaigns and actions of an uninformed or underinformed citizenry that determines the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of content,

ideas, curriculum.

Right now, I imagine a pinhole. A crack. A little opening. A space that allows me, and all of you, to contemplate and imagine something different. Something better. Something that can be, but is not yet.

But, once you find that opening you have to do something. My former student, Malik, as a twelve-year-old asked a room full of 500 adults, "What will you do?" as the adults celebrated Malik and his peers for fighting for a better, more just place to learn. He knew that the adults would return to their own lives in far-off cities after hearing them speak. He knew that he was not alone in having to learn in an unfair and ill-equipped school building. He also knew better than to simply take in the applause. He knew his words could prompt action. He incited action. Leaning on Malik's question and challenge, and that of Meghan and Kelli, I ask you the same. What is it that you will do? We have power, content knowledge, expertise, and pedagogical acumen. How can we use it at this moment? What can and will you do to resist and reimagine?

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A Critical Analysis of Florida’s “Anti-Woke” Legislation: Implications for Responsible Educators

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Abstract

This paper examines the disjunctions among the language of Florida’s ‘divisive concepts’ law, HB7, accompanying political rhetoric including legislative discussion on the law, and multiple state laws and policies enacted since 2021. HB7 purportedly bans indoctrination, (the antithesis of education) and prohibits endorsement but allows the discussion of specified concepts central to the law. Our analysis notes that while the explicitly “anti-Woke” political rhetoric has had a chilling effect on educators’ professional practice, the language of the law is vague and ambiguous enough to be interpreted as offering support for multicultural education rather than censoring it. Recommendations include how educators can continue to teach for racial equity and social justice imperative for democracy in a culturally diverse state.

Keywords: political rhetoric, Florida, multicultural education

“One thing is crystal clear—both robust intellectual inquiry and democracy require light to thrive. If our ‘priests of democracy’ are not allowed to shed light on challenging ideas, then democracy will die in darkness.” -Judge Mark Walker’s injunction against HB7 (see Sachs, 2022).

Florida as a legislative/political blueprint

Curriculum censorship has emerged as the latest battlefield in the historical struggle for educational equity in a culturally diverse nation. As a self-styled national leader in this legislative effort, the state of Florida offers a disturbing case study of its governor’s goals, strategy, and tactics to use Florida “as a blueprint for America’s Revival” (DeSantis, 2023). In the book, *The Courage to be Free*, Florida’s Governor DeSantis (2023) declares:

The battles we have fought in Florida—from defeating the biomedical security state to stifling woke corporations to fighting indoctrination in the schools—strike at the heart of what it means to be a Floridian and an American...Florida has shown that we have the capacity to win against. . . these elite institutions that have driven the country into a cycle of repeated failures. It takes determination. It requires strategic judgment (p. 251).

While it is unclear what “cycle of repeated failure” is being avoided by state legislation, or how and why the state would find fault with an education system it touts as #1 in the nation (Quinn, 2023), state legislators have launched an onslaught of legislation against K-12 and higher education institutions designed to restrict curriculum that does not align with the worldviews of the governor and fellow Republicans.

Per Christopher Rufo, the architect of the first nationwide “divisive concepts” law - Trump’s Executive Order #13950 of September 2020 - the publicly acknowledged strategy was to villainize “Critical Race Theory” as a catch-all phrase that targeted a broad set of ideas including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The aim was to counter the 2020 nationwide calls for racial equity and justice in what he described as “the most successful counter-attack against BLM as a political movement” (Golden, 2023, para. 8; see also PEN America, 2022). Rufo, who denies the existence of structural racism and seeks to undo institutional commitments to equity, was installed by DeSantis as a member of the Board of Trustees in the hostile takeover of the governance of New College in Florida (Greenfield, 2023). According to Beauchamp (2021), Rufo urges state leaders to use “the law as a weapon to weaken or even eliminate the social bases of opponents’ political power” by calling on the legislature to “remove the

attorney general through resignation or impeachment, lay siege to the universities through cutting federal subsidies, abolish teachers’ unions through legislation, and overturn school boards through winning elections” (paras. 2-4).

Following the Florida Department of Education ban on Critical Race Theory in K-12 education in July 2021, the governor has supported numerous laws targeting K-12 and higher education institutions, as well as LGBTQ+ communities, voting rights, abortion rights, and laws meant to shield his actions from public scrutiny and accountability. Table 1 lists some of these laws, and it is in the context of this collective legislative assault that we offer our analysis of one of them: HB7 – The Individual Freedom Act (also popularized as the “Stop Woke” or Anti-Woke law) that went into effect on July 1, 2022.

Table 1: Selected state laws and policies 2021-2023

K-12 Curriculum	Civic Rights/ Elections
<p>FL DOE ban on “CRT” (6/10/21)</p> <p>HB 5: Civics education (6/22/21)</p> <p>HB 1467 (3/25/22) Curriculum Transparency requiring all school library books to be reviewed by school media specialists</p> <p>HB 1557: “Don’t Say Gay” law (3/28/22) Math textbooks rejected for including “CRT” (4/18/22)</p> <p>HB 7: Anti “Woke” law (4/22/22) State support for AP African American History dropped (1/12 23)</p> <p>HB 1069 (5/17/23) Ban on instruction on gender identity extended to eighth grade; pronouns banned</p> <p>Public School Funding HB 1 (3/27/23) Expansion of vouchers to include any FL student enrolled in a private school.</p> <p>HB 1259 (5/11/23) Public funding for Charter schools for capital outlay without needs assessment required of every district.</p>	<p>HB 1: Ban on Protests (4/19/21) Motorists can run over protesters in street; Historical monuments protected; Local govt. cannot defund police</p> <p>Gerrymandering (4/21/22) Eliminated 2 Black districts</p> <p>Voting SB 90: Amendment to Election Law (4/29/21) Multiple restrictions on voting.</p> <p>SB 7050 (5/24/23) Amends ‘resign to run’ law to allow DeSantis to campaign for President without resigning as governor; restrictions on voter registration.</p> <p>School Boards HJR 31 (6/21/23) Voters to consider constitutional amendment requiring partisan school board elections</p> <p>HB 477 (5/9/23) Lower term limits from 12 to 8 years</p> <p>HB 411 (5/17/23) School Board candidates must live in the district.</p>

Higher Education	Human Rights
<p>HB 233: Viewpoint Diversity Survey (6/22/21)</p> <p>SB 7044: Anti-accreditation, tenure (4/19/22) House Speaker calls for submission of all documents DEI-related activity in the university including all committee agendas, minutes, texts and social media posts (1/12/23)</p> <p>Governor fires the President and Board of Trustees at New College and installs Christopher Rufo the architect of Trump’s “divisive concepts” legislation as a trustee. (1/31/23)</p> <p>SB 256: Decertifying faculty unions (5/9/23)</p> <p>HB 931 (5/15/23) Bans solicitation of a diversity statement of potential candidates for faculty positions.</p> <p>SB 266 (5/15/23) Defunds DEI programs; restricts general education curriculum; requires post-tenure review of faculty members to include criteria linked to student complaints and violations of state law.</p>	<p>SB 1028: Transgender female athletes ban (6/1/21)</p> <p>Data “request”: Gender-affirming care (1/12/23)</p> <p>Abortion Bans 15 weeks (4/14/22) SB 300 (4/13/23) 6 weeks</p> <p>SB 450 (4/20/23) Lowers threshold for jury recommendations for the Death Penalty from 12 to 8</p> <p>SB 1718 (5/10/23) Penalties for hiring undocumented immigrants; transportation of migrants to “liberal” locations out of state.</p>

Nicknamed by the governor as the “Stop Woke Act,” the core of HB7 comprises verbatim excerpts from the ‘divisive concepts’ of President Trump’s Executive Order #13950 of the previous year. Recognizing that a) most educators had not read the law, b) the widespread “anti-Woke” rhetoric was facilitating confusion and self-censorship among educators on topics of racism, sexism, and homophobia, and c) similar laws are being replicated in multiple states (Young & Friedman, 2022; Friedman et al., 2023), we offer this analysis of HB7 to achieve the following outcomes:

- Through an analysis of the language of the law, to identify what is banned and permitted;
- Through a juxtaposition of the language of the law with political rhetoric published in selected media reports and transcripts of legislators’ discussion of HB7, to identify the discrepancies between the language of law and its intended political interpretation; and
- Based on the above analyses and our own experiences as educators in Florida, to offer recommendations to equity-minded educators for continuing their professional practice while remaining within the legal parameters of HB7.

Designed as critical policy analysis (Diem & Brooks, 2022; Diem et al, 2014) to examine whose interests are privileged in decision-making, our data sources include

the legal text of HB7¹ documents including additional laws and policies pertaining to curriculum censorship, media releases posted on the governor’s website, news reports, and the transcripts of the three days of legislative discussion of the bill. The analysis was undertaken through a lens of critical multicultural education, a field grounded in a commitment to equitable educational outcomes for all students, particularly those of historically underserved backgrounds. Central to our investigation and praxis as multicultural teacher educators in Florida was the manner in which the law impacted the implementation of multicultural curricula.

The multiple cycles of analysis included independent and collaborative textual analyses of HB7 to identify what was and was not banned. Of significance in this analysis was the introduction to the purpose of the law; sections 1 (Unlawful employment practices) and 2 (Discrimination against students and employees in FL K-20 public education system) that repeat the eight specified concepts banned from endorsement; and section 3 governing required instruction containing the 1994 state mandates for Holocaust Education and African American History. This analysis revealed apparent contradictions within the law and disparities between the law and extant “Anti-Woke” political

¹ <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/7/BillText/er/PDF>

rhetoric. The critical analysis of political discourse, including the legislative discussion and the governor's rhetoric, revealed legislative and political intent. Our analysis is also informed by responses to the law underscoring a conceptualization of critical policy analysis as praxis. We draw on documents and guidelines developed by higher education institutions, governance units, and professional organizations, ongoing interactions with educators in school districts, our own presentations within the community, and legal analyses of the law to offer insights on how educators committed to democratic principles and equitable education might interpret and respond to HB7.

HB7: What is Banned and What is Permitted

Despite the handout on the governor's website that nicknamed HB7 the "Stop Woke Act" and claimed to codify the "prohibition on critical race theory"², the language of HB7 does not explicitly ban Critical Race Theory or perceived "woke" content. In fact, neither term is mentioned in the law. Instead, HB7 prohibits "classroom instruction from being used to indoctrinate or persuade students" [lines 23-24; 41-42; 389-390; 533-534]. HB7 defines as discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sex, "required activity that espouses, promotes, advances, inculcates, or compels ... individuals to believe" [lines 7-8; 68-69; 225] the eight "specified" (aka "divisive") concepts from E.O #13950. Presumably, this is what the state defines as "woke" or "CRT." Notably, per lines 104-105, HB7 "may not be construed to prohibit" discussion of the concepts in an "objective" manner.

The specified concepts prohibited by HB7 for endorsement are as follows:

1. Members of one race, color, national origin, or sex **are morally superior** to members of another race, color, national origin, or sex.
2. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, color, national origin, or sex **is inherently racist**, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.
3. An individual's **moral character** or status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily **determined by his or her race**, color, sex or national origin.

4. Members of one race, color, sex or national origin cannot and should not attempt to treat others **without respect to** race, color, sex or national origin.
5. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, color, sex or national origin, **bears responsibility for**, or should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment because of, **actions committed in the past** by other members of the same race, color, sex, or national origin.
6. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, color, sex or national origin, **should be discriminated against** or receive adverse treatment **to achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion**.
7. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, color, sex or national origin, **bears personal responsibility for and must feel guilt**, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress because of actions, in which the person played no part, committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, sex or national origin.
8. Such virtues as **merit, excellence, hard work, fairness, neutrality, objectivity, and racial colorblindness** are racist or sexist, or **were created** by members of a particular race, color, sex, or national origin, **to oppress** members of another race, color, sex or national origin. (lines 72-103; 222- 257; 507-523; emphasis in bold added).

As our analysis demonstrates, few equity-minded teachers would endorse these concepts that, as written, demonstrate an alarming ignorance of educational practice. During the House debate on HB7, when pressed on what teachers would be permitted and banned from doing, proponents of the bill kept repeating that HB7 intended to "make sure that no one goes out of their way to assign blame for a particular event simply because they belong to a particular race, national origin or sex" (The Florida Channel, 2022, 2/2/22, time stamp: 1.45 p.m.) although no evidence of such behavior occurring in the state's public schools was offered.

Since so few have read the law and have relied on the media and political rhetoric, they are unaware of – and surprised by – what is permitted. Unique to Florida's "divisive concepts" law is the integration of the state's 1994 mandates for teaching about the Holocaust and African American history. HB7 incorporates the specific language of mandated instruction which requires the

² <https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Stop-Woke-Handout.pdf>

Holocaust and African American History to be taught in a manner that leads to:

an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person, for the purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions ...” (lines 335-341).

In fact, HB7 expands the African American history mandate to require teaching

...how the freedoms of persons have been infringed by sexism, slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination, including topics relating to the enactment and enforcement of laws resulting in sexism, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination and how recognition of these freedoms has overturned these unjust laws (lines 383-389; 527-532).

The inclusion of these mandates appears to contradict the “Anti-Woke” rhetoric surrounding HB7, and yet offer the law’s proponents a cover against charges of racism in what is proposed. Simultaneously, it also allows equity-minded educators to re-frame both the language and the intent of the law as a pathway forward amid the intentional confusion and fear that the law has deliberately spawned.

Interpreting HB7

In this section, we explore multiple interpretations of HB7. We discuss the contrasting interpretations of the governor and state legislators (as evident in the political rhetoric and legislative floor debates surrounding the bill) and our own reframing of HB7, offered to educators concerned about the chilling effect of curriculum censorship represented by the bill. Although no evidence of indoctrination in schools was provided in the legislative discussions, the accusation served as the rationale for HB7 as evident in the political rhetoric surrounding the bill about “woke indoctrination” (Allen, 2022) an oxymoron, in our view. Furthermore, education is widely viewed as the antithesis of indoctrination, defined as “teaching (a person or group) to accept a set of beliefs uncritically³.”

Whereas education facilitates exposure to divergent perspectives and encourages question and debate, indoctrination - a process more typical in religious or political contexts - deliberately avoids or censors alternative viewpoints (Tan, 2014). Ironically, “wokeness” - what the political rhetoric advocates against - is the perfect antidote to the indoctrination that the law is designed to ban, while - in contrast - curriculum censorship is a tool to perpetuate indoctrination. Given the state’s lack of evidence to support the charge of indoctrination in schools and the integration of 1994 curriculum mandates, we re-frame HB7 as legislative theatrics, actions that are excessively dramatic in terms of their attention-seeking, but in actuality ban what does not occur and mandate what already exists in schools. Such theatrics are evident also in the prohibition of the endorsement - but not the objective discussion - of the specified concepts central to HB7. In fact, except for concept #8 and the poorly worded concept #4, few equity-minded educators would endorse the specified concepts as written.

Consequently, in our analysis of the specified concepts we re-frame them as a call for multicultural education, rather than a sanction against it. We do so cognizant of the fact that this was not the intent of HB7, and in no way is our analysis a defense of the law. For example, our reframing notes that multicultural educators do not endorse the notion that one group is “morally superior” to another (#1), or that anyone is “inherently racist” (#2), since racism is learned. Consequently, we propose these concepts as an invitation to explicitly counter curricula that teach such social hierarchies or bigotry. Instead, we advocate curricula like the Holocaust Education and African American History mandates, that follow nationally recognized practices in multicultural education and social studies (Grant & Sleeter, 2007; National Association for Multicultural Education, n.d.; National Council for the Social Studies, 2023; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). These mandates are explicitly anti-racist and inclusive and lay the foundation for developing responsible and respectful citizens who are comfortable with diversity in pluralistic and democratic contexts. Multicultural educators do not endorse the notion that moral character or social privilege is determined by race (#3). In fact, we teach that privilege is contextual and intersectional. The teaching and practice of respect (#4) is an essential principle of multicultural education.

³ <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/indoctrination>

While multicultural educators do not teach that an individual bears responsibility for the past (#5), we do explore how we are responsible for the present and the future. Statement six, no one “should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment to achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion,” incorrectly identifies DEI, rather than discrimination as a problem that educators need to address. Nor do multicultural educators teach or endorse the idea that our students bear personal responsibility for the past, even if they feel (unintended) guilt or anguish about what they are learning. In fact, we engage our students with the truth of history, troubling as it may be, to free students from past mistakes so that they can propose humane solutions to the thorny problems of discrimination of all sorts.

For racially White-identifying students, multicultural lessons are opportunities to recognize a) their ancestors’ own experiences with extant White Supremacy as was the case with the Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants, and b) the diversity among White-identifying groups some of whom were equity advocates who acted in solidarity with racially minoritized communities as they faced the cruelty and callousness of proponents of racist laws, life-threatening political discourse and bigoted social values. When we discuss the principles of merit, hard work, neutrality, and racial colorblindness, we engage our students in exploring how these ideas and principles create biases and can foster discrimination. Such engagement that facilitates students’ independent and critical thinking and decision-making is germane to the pedagogy of multicultural educators and an evident antidote to indoctrination. Ironically, such pedagogy is also prohibited in textbook adoption guidelines related to HB7: including “Critical Race Theory, Social Justice, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Social and Emotional Learning, and any other unsolicited theories that may lead to student indoctrination are prohibited” (Florida Department of Education, 2022, p. 23).

Given the disjunctions between the political rhetoric and the language of the bill, and the obviously contradictory statements contained in the same bill, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the language and content of HB7 are deliberately confusing. The American Association of University Professors’ (2023) Special Committee Report on Academic Freedom in Florida, notes that such confusion is “a feature, not a bug ...

because sowing confusion and fear among [educators] about what they can and cannot teach may be the underlying and main goal of the curricular legislation as a package” (p. 34). The fear and uncertainty fostered by this confusion as well as the threats of losing school funding and dismissing individual teachers and administrators has created an environment in which school leaders and teachers are self-censoring by eliminating anything that calls out racism, systemic racism, or the rights of LGBTQ+ and transgender people.

Furthermore, the interaction of HB7 with the overwhelming number of other laws passed exacerbates the chilling effect, even though the language of HB7 permits the discussion of these topics. These include the Department of Education’s previous ban on “Critical Race Theory” (but with no explanation on how the mandate to teach African American history intersected with it); HB 1557 the so-called “Don’t say gay” bill that banned discussions of sexual orientation in K-3 classes now expanded to grade 8 through HB 1069; and HB 1467 that allowed parents to call into question books and materials to which students were exposed. In 2023 the state censorship of viewpoints with which it disagrees included the attack on and defunding of advocacy for DEI (SB 266), the State Department of Education’s decision to ban the adoption of a new AP African American History course from Florida high schools as well as the attempt to ban AP Psychology (Pendharkar, 2023; Singer, 2023), collectively comprising the feigned effort to prevent supposed indoctrination.

The interpretations of HB7 and consequent responses by K-12 and higher education institutions have also been a concern. While many educators initially dismissed the 2021 ban on Critical Race Theory as irrelevant to their work, the subsequent onslaught of legislation has resulted in widespread self-censorship of curriculum, the abandonment of much-needed teacher professional development, truncated student support, and inhospitable institutional climates for teachers and students, particularly those of historically under-served backgrounds who are most adversely impacted by these laws. As our interactions with community educators have revealed, even programs that are explicitly aimed at advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion are required to remove these content

components. School leaders who are undereducated on what CRT is or isn't, are making authoritarian decisions on intellectual freedom and professional autonomy, pursuing a "colorblind" ideology without acknowledging diversity issues. Threats to defund schools and programs have adversely impacted historically disenfranchised school communities and populations. Table 2 below summarizes the impact on K-12 as reported by our institutional partners in our service districts, even prior to the legislation of 2023 taking effect.

Table 2: Impact of HB7

Bans on Curriculum	Teacher PD Abandoned	Student Support Truncated	Inhospitable bureaucratic climate
Hundreds of titles off shelves	PD contracts canceled	Use of preferred pronouns discontinued	Equity leaders fired/demoted; sidelined.
No student-initiated topics; diverse instructional methods	All PD materials scrutinized / scrubbed	Funding for student clubs, field trips delayed	Requirement to prove that activities don't violate the vague law
Permission Slips required for race, gender, LGBTQ+ topics	Cultural Competence no longer required for new teachers	Student advocacy clubs eliminated	District Protocols for safety of LGBTQ+ students abandoned
Students' access to electives diminished	Annual Equity Conference challenged	Tensions and frustrations among students/ student groups	Talented teachers and leaders leaving the district, the profession, the state.

HB7 has adversely affected public higher education in Florida as well, although the response of the faculty to the law has been mixed. The passage of the bill has caused institutions previously public in their commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to abandon such commitments including curriculum development and several professional development efforts. Emboldened by political super majorities, state legislators have launched relentless attacks on

academic freedom, and all efforts related to DEI, even going so far in an early version of HB999/SB 266 to dismantle tenure, transfer faculty hiring and firing decisions to state-appointed boards of trustees and ban wholesale particular fields of study in higher education. SB 266 (effective July 1, 2023) that bans the use of public or private funds for DEI sends an unambiguous message about the state of such commitments barely three years after the Board of Governors of the State University System (2020) pledged the following:

As a powerful and influential voice in Florida, it is time for the State University System, including students, faculty staff, and alumni to actively engage in finding solutions to peacefully eliminate racism and discrimination. This will be the critical mission of our twelve state universities, as it is our duty as societal leaders to help end prejudice and to promote social justice for all (para. 3).

The targeting of DEI activities came before the start of the 2023 legislative session when, in December 2022, higher education institutions were required to report on expenditures on DEI efforts, as well as support services for students that included specifics on gender-affirming services (Diep & Pettit, 2023; Mabe, 2023). This was followed up in January 2023 by a document request of all faculty involved in DEI work to submit to the state every email, text, and media message that they had sent or received related to DEI activities in the institution (see Renner, 2023). Clearly, such surveillance was intended to intimidate faculty and staff and sustain the chilling effect on DEI-related efforts. As of this writing, proposed 2024 state legislation includes a bill (SB 1372) that targets colleges of education by extending curriculum censorship to educator preparation programs. Alarmed by the authoritarianism on full display in the removal of the President and the Board of Trustees at New College (Mazzei, 2023) and the collective impact of the Florida legislature commentators have begun to draw parallels between the early warning signs of fascism in the actions of the governor and the state legislators (McNeill, 2023; Stephan, 2023).

Responding to HB7

In response to what the American Association of University Professors (2023) characterizes as a "systematic effort to dictate and enforce conformity

with a narrow and reactionary political and ideological agenda” (p. 2), many have stood up in opposition, through teach-ins, walkouts or statements of support for DEI work and colleagues who engage in it. Our response to this atmosphere of fear and threat has been to study the law and to share our findings with fellow educators about how to continue teaching about race, class, and gender without running afoul of the law. We have done this by publishing a blog of our analysis⁴, presenting our findings to school district leaders, at local and national conferences, and many other professional and community venues. We have maintained ongoing communication and collaboration with fellow teachers at the K-12 and university levels. We encouraged a statement of support for educators from our College of Education and we have supported advocacy through the Faculty Senate and Union.

Going forward, we recognize that the passage of new laws such as SB 266 and the attacks on unions in SB 256 at the end of the 2023 legislative session significantly worsen conditions in the state, making it even more important for educators in Florida to oppose the degradation of public education in the state. Consequently, we urge all educators in Florida to know the law, to understand the intent of the law, to avoid anticipatory compliance (Snyder, 2021), and to refrain from relying on political rhetoric for information about the law. Given the state’s faux opposition to indoctrination as a ruse for requiring public educators to serve as “the State’s mouthpieces” in the classroom (Pernell v. Florida Board of Governors, 2022, p. 8) for state-sponsored “‘indoctrination’ in its preferred orthodoxy” (p. 3), we urge commitment to pedagogy that intentionally interrupts indoctrination. This includes pedagogy that emphasizes questioning, debate, student-centered inquiry, multiple perspectives, and inclusivity. We acknowledge and urge the practice of fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021) modeled historically by African American educators who worked under challenging circumstances that censored knowledge about Black history and epistemology, especially collaborating with parents who support DEI curricula and programs. We pledge to uphold professional standards, to be morally responsible, and to challenge bigotry.

We urge all educators to join in collective action against what is taking place in Florida and other states around the nation. We remind fellow citizens that Florida’s governor intends to use the experience of Florida “as the blueprint for America’s revival” in his ambitions towards the Presidency of the United States. We join with the American Association of University Professors (2023) who recognize that Florida faces “an ideologically driven assault unparalleled in U.S. history” (p. 2) and urge “all professional organizations, unions, faculty, staff, and administrators across the country to fight such “reforms” tooth and nail and to offer support to colleagues and unions in Florida and beyond however they can” (p. 52).

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Hyperindividualism and the Relative Power of Teachers

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Abstract

Hyperindividualism is the tendency, in a liberal individualist society, for social actors to understand themselves as disparate entities rather than primarily as members of collectives or groups. In this essay, I mobilize a critical curriculum theory lens to trouble the ways teachers are currently figured in our neoliberal social reality. Specifically, I work to theorize the phenomenon of *hyperindividualism* as it connects to ways we conceptualize the relative power of teachers in U.S. classrooms. Hyperindividualism names how we are radically singularized in late capitalism, all of us rendered entrepreneurs of ourselves, “brands” to market, rather than whole human beings who are not reducible solely to their economic function. Here I first explain the concept of hyperindividualism before connecting this explicitly to neoliberalism and our contemporary political economy. From there, I work to showcase three ways this impacts teachers and teaching: the teacher as savior problem, the teacher as solo actor problem, and the teacher as predictive of student futures problem. I conclude with implications for further engagements with our ideological present in ways that are more pedagogically and politically responsive to hyperindividualism in teaching and in education more broadly.

Keywords: hyperindividualism, curriculum theory, neoliberalism, critical theory

Introduction

Hyperindividualism is the tendency, in a liberal individualist society, for social actors to understand themselves as disparate entities rather than primarily as members of collectives or groups. Liberal individualism, as an epistemology and way of being, sees the primary

social actor as an individual who is capable of transcending the various social categories that a person might be a part of. While there are group-level phenomena in this worldview, those groups can best be understood as collectives of individuals. Hyperindividualism can thus be understood as what happens when liberal individualists are reinforced in their individuality to the extent that social categories lose any and all meanings. Everyone is an independent social agent, and so everyone is thus independently responsible for their social location and social realities.

In this essay, I mobilize a critical curriculum theory (Pinar, et.al., 1995; 2004) lens to trouble the ways teachers are currently figured in our neoliberal social reality. Curriculum theory asks critical questions of the interconnections and relations between academic knowledge and social experience. Feminist contributions to this work have added additional questionings and openings such as “who does this curriculum think you are” (Ellsworth, 1997) and “why doesn’t this feel empowering” in relation to critical pedagogy and its always-already democratic approaches (Ellsworth, 1989)? Critical scholars of color added deeper engagements with subjectivity, race, and resistance to white supremacy summarized most recently in the question from Love (2019) of what it means to “want to do more than survive” for students and people of color. Indigenous critiques of democratic practices as tactics of erasure and epistemicide further complicate and offer even greater critical entanglements from which to build and scaffold curricular theories with aims to impact material practices (Grande, 2015). And lest curriculum theory ever coalesce around any particular maxim, queer insinuations that “no practice is always anti-oppressive” keeps curriculum theory from becoming a stale set of tenants or rules (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 3). Taken collectively, we can think of a critical curriculum theory lens as offering engagements with the full range of interactions and intersections of the academic and

social worlds. Such an approach lends itself especially well to the present project, as I wish to problematize, further than other scholars have before this, the extent to which cultural logics of hyperindividualism pervade the work of teachers in our contemporary political and historical moment.

Specifically, I work to theorize the phenomenon of *hyperindividualism* as it connects to ways we conceptualize the relative power of teachers in U.S. classrooms. Hyperindividualism names the ways in which we are radically singularized in late capitalism, all of us rendered entrepreneurs of ourselves, “brands” to market, rather than whole human beings who are not reducible solely to their economic function. While hyperindividualism has received some attention from educational scholars (Kumashiro, 2020) it has heretofore been largely undertheorized in the field of educational research. This work seeks to advance efforts to better name the ways that neoliberal rationality (Brown, 2015) has produced the conception of hyperindividualism that is furthering the marginalization of public school teachers. Here I first explain the concept of hyperindividualism before connecting this explicitly to neoliberalism and our contemporary political economy. From there, I work to showcase three ways this impacts teachers and teaching: the teacher as savior problem, the teacher as solo actor problem, and the teacher as predictive of student futures problem. I conclude with implications for further engagements with our ideological present in ways that are more pedagogically and politically responsive to hyperindividualism in teaching and in education more broadly.

Hyperindividualism – Contexts and Contradictions

We can immediately recognize the ways that hyperindividualism, as an ideology, produces discourses that are desired in capitalism. Rational actors, operating independently, are given the “option” of meritocratically “working hard” to achieve “success,” and thus a hyperindividualist ideology seeks to maximize these individuated freedoms at the level of the particular. Hyperindividualism can then be understood as an outcome of the dominant economic mode of production in our current era of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism seeks to maximize the abilities of private interests to access global spaces and/as markets in an effort to privatize

and monetize all elements of society. Neoliberalism hails us to understand all social entities as akin to businesses, and centers logics of free market capitalism in areas heretofore deemed public or beyond the purview of private economic interests. Schools and universities, for instance, in neoliberalism become more akin to businesses, with the products they produce being students as commodities. Once commoditized, students are dehumanized to maximize the effectiveness of the school or university in its return on various investments. Rather than broad and shared aims of educating members of society for collective benefits, education becomes a credential that is a testament to an *individual’s* work and skills, seen as benefiting only the *particular* individual in question. Teachers thus become functionaries who produce student-commodities, sorted based on their individual merits.

Historically, hyperindividualism has been accelerated by economic theorists following in the footsteps of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, though in those discourses the term “individualism” is used. For Hayek (1948/1980), individualism emerged from the Christian preoccupation with “saving” individual souls. He argued for an individualism in contemporary life that makes possible social equality based on the recognition of individual differences in “natural endowments and capacities” through economic means (p. 13). Hayek’s sense of “natural” abilities creates an equality premised on all social actors being equally individual. Their equality derives from their immutability as individuals, and thus any kind of social inequality is evidence for the “natural” differences Hayek’s theory rests on. Economic theories that follow in this tradition celebrate individuals as entrepreneurs of themselves. In our contemporary reality, we can think of the notion of one’s own “personal brand” as an example of this ideology. Each individual is a business entity, or at least can best be understood as such, and so maximizing returns on investments allows the rational social actor hypothesis to go unquestioned.

Hayek’s sense of the individual takes on a particularly paternalistic and deficit-steeped notion of human consciousness and capacity for imagining peoples’ impacts beyond their immediate surroundings in the world. I quote him at length here before working to locate the particular originary conceptions to the

contemporary phenomenon of hyperindividualism before moving on to the present discussion of impacts on teachers and their relative power:

This is the constitutional limitation of man's knowledge and interest, the fact that he cannot know more than a tiny part of the whole of society and that therefore all that can enter into his motives are the immediate effects which his actions will have in the sphere he knows. All the possible differences in men's moral attitudes amount to little, so far as their significance for social organization is concerned, compared with the facts that all man's mind can effectively comprehend are the facts of the narrow circle of which he is the center; that, whether he is completely selfish or the most perfect altruist, the human needs for which he can effectively care are an almost negligible fraction of the needs of all members of society. The real question, therefore, is not whether man is, or ought to be, guided by selfish motives but whether we can allow him to be guided in his actions by those immediate consequences which he can know and care for or whether he ought to be made to do what seems appropriate to somebody else who is supposed to possess a fuller comprehension of the significance of these actions to society as a whole (*emphasis in original p. 14*).

One can see Hayek's paternalism and condescension in abundance in this passage, but these easy sorts of criticisms miss a critical piece of the underlying logic being offered here. There is an unspoken pedagogical failure that is at the center of Hayek's sense of how limited the scope of one's concern can be. The problem, according to Hayek, is in what one cannot or does not know about the greater society. But this distinction, between an inability to know or understand the experiences and desires of others, or the "needs of all members of society," and acting in one's own radical self-interest, offers a crucial insight into the cultural logic of hyperindividualism authored by Hayek and carried out by his contemporary adherents. Of course, for merely practical reasons, we can concede that it is absolutely impossible to account for every individual person's unique and specific quirks, idiosyncrasies, and specificities. But the concept of needs takes us to a different sociocultural paradigm, as the needs of human beings are absolutely articulable. We can learn to recognize and respond to needs (Casey, 2011) as we recognize them in others and make connections

between our own particular perspectives and experiences and those of others. Such engagements might be thought of as the very basis for politics and political activity in human groups.

The seeming absence, then, of an explicitly political project in Hayek's sense of the hyperindividuated self helps us locate its ideological saturation. As the test for any and all ideologies is the extent to which they are capable of rendering what is utterly artificial and of human creation as *natural*, Hayek's sense of the limits of human consciousness to include demands and desires at the abstract level of the group or society is an explicitly political orientation that forecloses possibilities of collective mobilizations on the side of human flourishing. As Hayek's "man" cannot think or imagine beyond his own limited sphere of influence, beyond "the narrow circle of which he is the center," there is a natural response to ignore possibilities for alternative configurations. If it is not possible for people to think and understand outside of their own limited experiences and sphere(s) of influence, there is no collectivist politics to be enacted. And thus, any such engagement can be dismissed out of hand, as always already doomed to failure in its misrecognition of the limits of humanity.

Old cliches of liberal democratic capitalism as the least bad of all the possible configurations of the nation-state similarly function to ideologically bind the terrain of debate in ways that protect the interests of the owners of the means of production and architects of our hyperindividualist reality. The taken-for-granted starting point in such debates is the inevitability, the *naturalness*, of the nation-state. No better version of the nation-state feels possible to many of these pontificators, yet the idea of abolishing the nation-state and realizing planetary humanism feels foreclosed from the outset. Hayek and similar neoliberal thinkers are thus able to eliminate possible criticisms of their ideas by going beyond appeals to commonsense (Kumashiro, 2015) to rather insist that the natural conditions of humanity create limits on the possibilities for human life that necessitate a particularly individuated and entrepreneurial social actor to emerge as the possible type or kind of human. This renders hyperindividualism not only as the dominant paradigm in society, the worldview the overwhelming majority of social actors are meant to take on and assume as their own but as the only possible worldview altogether. There is no

marketplace of ideas here where hyperindividualism is in competition or conflict: there is simply a recognition of the *natural* limitations of human consciousness and then the varied responses that play out in light of the radical equality of all social actors in terms of their immutability as individuals. Being equally individuated becomes the only sort of equality that is possible in such an approach – the differentiated outcomes for different human actors are then the results of seemingly *natural* abilities that meritocratically function to organize all the various “centers” that people are trapped in due to their ignorance of others and of the broader society. Even offering a pedagogical alternative can be dismissed in such a worldview, as the impossibility of accounting for every instance of human specificity and uniqueness produces a cyclical loop of sameness and acceptance of an oppressive status quo. Everything is the way it is because there is no possible alternative – ideological coercion of the highest order.

Hyperindividualism then produces an additional social impact, in terms of how we conceptualize group-level discriminations. Market logics that cluster various business entities into particular markets and categories can be extended to social groups. Those who come from historically marginalized backgrounds are thus not so much suffering from structural discriminations as much as struggling in the marketplace to realize their capacities to maximize profits and achieve individual success. This presents an impediment to social endeavors at the level of the group or society, like Affirmative Action and other similar policies aimed at redressing historical oppressions. For hyperindividualists, such programs undermine and distort the *natural* order of society premised on meritocracy and thus should be resisted. Similarly, notions of a “living wage” are seen by hyperindividualists as disincentivizing individual effort and limiting the individual will and power of entrepreneurs to set and maintain their practices regarding their employees. We should not be surprised, then, that we see so many of the same kinds of ideologies impacting the work of teachers. The preceding theoretical discussion of hyperindividualism and its origins with Hayek and neoliberal economic ideologues offers only a brief summary of such perspectives and is meant to support the reader’s engagement with the remainder of the essay centered on hyperindividualism’s impact on P-12 teachers. While

I return to some of these concepts in the conclusion, I ask the reader to sustain the critiques of Hayek put forward here to nuance and complexify the ways hyperindividualism pervades the work of teachers as well as the ways we make sense of teachers and their/our work in our contemporary historical moment.

Teachers as Saviors

Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2006) have documented the ways that many teachers, particularly white teachers, enter the field with notions of rescuing or saving marginalized youth through their work as teachers. Such a perspective is of course antithetical to dynamic and critical humanizing work with youth, who do not need saving (Freire, 2000). But this perspective also signals the ways that teachers have been positioned (and are hailed, in the Althusserian [2020] sense) to perform the role of savior as if such a role were possible. Popular images of teachers from films like *Freedom Writers* and *Dangerous Minds* position savior figure teachers who sacrifice everything for their working-class students of color, and through this sacrifice they are able to support their students in overcoming every material determinant standing in the way of their relative success. This functions to reinforce neoliberal hyperindividualism because the work to transform our oppressive reality must incorporate whole collectives and communities, not singular teachers operating behind closed doors in classrooms scattered across the country. Without coordination and shared efforts, such work is doomed to be piecemeal and tokenistic.

And this is precisely what we see, even in critical educational research seeking to celebrate counternarratives or examples of teachers actualizing their humanizing commitments. We are hailed to produce examples of how justice remains possible in classrooms if teachers can only find the right ways to contort their work into the neoliberal box of standards, value-added metrics, and annual yearly progress. I’ve done this in my own work, celebrating teachers and administrators fighting against white supremacy in their own classroom and school contexts (see McManimon & Casey, 2018; Casey & McManimon, 2020). That they have done this on their own, even if it is genuinely advancing the life chances of students of color, reinforces the hyperindividualism rampant throughout

even most Leftist conceptions of the role of teachers in our contemporary moment. Teachers are hailed into savior roles as synonymous with what it even means to be a teacher in many school contexts. So while we know the correct answer for progressive educators is to resist the savior trope and role, we are citationally pushed back into it over and over again in our efforts to sustain something like hope for human thriving in our wildly oppressive social order.

That we have so many stories and examples of savior teachers makes this even harder to work against. Various iterations of different teacher of the year awards, for instance, function to isolate and individuate particular educators as if they were not part of larger complex systems, like schools and classrooms. Celebrating the particular contributions of a particular educator thus works to ideologically position the teacher as highly movable, as though she could be in any social context and be the same educator. Or, in more neoliberal terms, be as “effective” in any school they might happen to be working in. While ignoring the various ways that learning one’s sociopolitical contexts is crucial for authentic teaching and learning on the side of justice (Ladson-Billings, 2006), such a perspective functions to remove larger contexts that impact a wealth of outcomes in schools and classrooms. That a teacher is successful on their own, as an individual teacher, functions to locate any interventions on the level of the teacher as such. There is thus nothing to be done to the larger population of teachers, only work to be done on individual teachers to maximize their own relative efficiency. Such effects are difficult to understand beyond the narrow positivist “value-added” frameworks that animate so much of contemporary understandings of what it means to be a teacher.

This works to reinforce conceptions of teachers as saviors then even in those who are wise enough to resist such framings. Because even if I reject completely the notion of “saving” students, the hyperindividuated ways we are hailed to understand others as disparate and isolated individuals means any kind of collective success or achievement is misrecognized as the result of individual brilliance and resilience. This can help us understand why it is seemingly so difficult to realize large-scale interventions modeled after successful programs and practices from sites outside of one’s own community school context. We cannot implement the

same things and expect the same outcomes because those engaged in the work are so different and particular – because of the teachers as saviors not because of the contextual specificity of all learning environments. The outcome is that school failures and successes are both treated as evidence of individual teacher contributions – whether thriving or struggling, all outcomes lead back to the ideological project of positioning hyperindividualized teachers as saviors.

Teachers as Solo Actors

Next, we can turn to the teacher as solo actor problem. By “solo actor” I mean to point to the ways that neoliberal frames for teachers and teaching tend to collapse all the work of the school onto the teacher themselves, without sufficient engagement with the wealth of other social actors who interact in the schooling experiences of students. For instance, we can look at many instances of professional development work for schools focused on race and racism that all teachers in a school attend, but the support staff, paraprofessionals, coaches, administrators, and other adults who work with youth in such schools are excluded or not required to attend (McManimon & Casey, 2018; Casey & McManimon, 2020). This creates a false notion that oppression in schools happens only in academic areas, where certified teachers are present. But of course, any time spent in schools will tell us that much of what transpires happens outside the purview of standards and objectives being carefully administered and assessed. This reinforces hyperindividualism because in isolating teachers exclusively, other material determinants in students’ lives are obscured, and once again collective struggles are nullified from go. Teachers are hailed to ask, “What can I do?” rather than working to articulate broader social influences on the life chances and schooling experiences of their students. Hyperindividualism pushes teachers to become narrowly preoccupied with questions of their own complicity and culpability rather than understanding the structural nature of the challenges facing them and their students. Of course, this is beneficial for neoliberal rationality, because isolated individuals pose far less of a threat to late capitalism than collectives do.

I can’t count the number of times I’ve concluded a talk on race and racism and been asked afterward by a

practitioner what suggestions I have for them and their particular work to “put into practice” what they’ve learned. Immediately, I feel compelled to respond, even though I know I don’t have enough information about who they are and who they are working with. My desire to respond to the genuine yearning for strategies and suggestions implicates me in hyperindividualism because I reduce my own arguments, which typically focus on the structural determinisms of white supremacy and capitalism that make humanizing work in schools impossible (see Casey, 2016), to the level of the individual practitioner in their individuated classroom working to realize what “Dr. Casey” told her to do after she heard them give a talk about white teachers and antiracism. The solo actor problem resounds with logical potency and power in Western capitalist-saturated epistemologies – of course, I need to provide actions that individual teachers can take up in their work. If I fail to do so, I am failing in my role as a teacher educator and professional development facilitator who has been tasked with educating my participants on ways they can realize more just outcomes for their students. Yet in doing so, I reinforce the anti-intellectualism and instrumentality of hyperindividualism.

This propensity to locate justice struggles in schools at the level of the teacher yet again seemingly limits both reactionary and progressivist approaches to teacher learning and school reform work. In my own experiences, I have struggled to understand the ways that some teachers’ unions have resisted engaging more with the antiracist work I have sought for them to take on as it conflicts with prearranged schedules for professional development. For instance, my colleague and I have found through our research that one of the most powerful interventions we can offer practicing teachers are spaces wherein they are able to connect with other teachers from different schools, subject areas, grade levels, and even school districts (see Casey & McManimon, 2020). As we sought to bring our model to a larger scale working with an entire district, we learned that because of union policies, we would not be able to create heterogeneous discussion groups for teachers to have support mechanisms and engagements with others centered solely around their work to engage in more antiracist pedagogies with and for their students of color. Further, the professional development work we were brought on to do was

specifically and solely for teachers – no other school staff were allowed, let alone encouraged, to participate. The seeming irony, of course, is that the progressivist union functioned not only to block a research-backed intervention on the side of progressive pedagogical interventions but also functioned to limit the scope and scale of justice work in schools exclusively to the level of the teacher. Reactionary organizations like Teach for America celebrate the same conceptions of teachers as solo actors and as the “most important” factor in students’ life chances for school success. We thus have yet more evidence of the powerful ideological saturation of hyperindividualism in our broader conceptions of teachers and teaching. Much like the earlier examples of teachers as saviors, teachers as solo actors paradigms are reinforced by the political left as well as the political right, working in concert to condition the state of “naturalness” that produces cultural logics that any interventions on the scale of a school must begin and end with the teachers therein.

Teachers as Predictive of Student Futures

Finally, we can examine the teacher as predictive of student futures problem. This problem focuses especially on the ways that teachers have come to be seen as the reason for student success or failure in school and beyond. Films like *Waiting for Superman* and organizations like Teach for America propagate the idea that the most impactful thing in a working-class student of color’s life and life chances for success in school is the quality of their teachers. If this were true, perhaps the myriad programs and efforts at raising test scores for historically marginalized students would have seen us actually transform our oppressive social order. But as Berliner and Glass (2014) have summarized, “outside-of-school factors, having nothing to do with teacher competency, appear to have at least twice the weight in predicting student achievement as do the inside-of-school factors” (p. 50). In other words, the in-school experiences of teacher quality pale in comparison to the out-of-school experiences of youth in terms of why they “achieve” the ways they do in school. On top of the many meaningful critiques of the Eurocentric and culturally irrelevant materials that make up high-stakes achievement tests (Au, 2010) we can see such conceptions functioning to build up hyperindividualism in teachers to understand themselves as the most important factor in the life

chances of their students. We can see yet again the ways this functions on the side of neoliberalism because it scapegoats teachers as the cause of structural and systemic poverty and oppression. And further, it focuses our attention onto notions of pedagogical strategies rather than transforming systems like housing, health care, and transportation.

This doubles down on hyperindividualist rationality because we can locate mathematical formulae that offer the hypothetical ability to isolate and locate a particular teacher's impact on a particular student in a particular historical moment. There are of course entire state educational systems premised on this concept, with seemingly more and more states working to create "merit-based" approaches to teacher compensation predicated on the value-added metrics derived from statistical inferences on high-stakes standardized tests. But again, where a student lives has a far greater impact on their life chances and eventual educational "achievement" than the "quality" of their teachers. Locating patterns of disinvestment and structural oppression in the concept of teacher quality functions to not only to scapegoat teachers for the whole of our oppressive social order but also ideologically narrows the possible responses one might make to such a reality. There is seemingly no way to change the conditions of where and how students live outside of school, and thus outwardly the only variable that is manipulable at the level of policy is the teacher and their relative preparation for her role. Hyperindividualism sees the concept of housing as a series of choices one is capable of making, and thus no policy intervention is needed – only those areas that seemingly do not present an individuated choice, like where a student is zoned and what classroom they are assigned to, are possible areas to expand one's ability to meritocratically assert one's individual freedom(s) of choice. Granting more of such choices functions to ideologically reinforce hyperindividualism as it simultaneously fortifies the conception of teachers' impacting their students in ways that go beyond other social determinants in their lives. Such determinants, like race, social class, or parental educational achievement level, become invisibilized and taken for granted as simply particular manifestations of uniqueness and situatedness, rather than as evidence for larger patterns of oppression and dispossession.

This calls to mind Jean Anyon's (2014) work to elasticize and expand what "counts" as educational research and educational policy. Anyon demonstrated how working to advance literacy, for instance, can have meaningful economic impacts in societal contexts where literacy is not already widely prevalent. Yet, in a societal context like the United States, literacy is already so widely spread that any possible economic benefits have already occurred. The absurdity of contemporary debates around the so-called "science of reading" showcases this point even further. In Tennessee, where I live, educators are bracing for the pending "third-grade retention law" that will see every third grader who is not deemed "proficient" on end-of-year literacy assessments retained. If put in place last year, about 70% of third graders would have been retained. Yet, any time spent around young people in 2023 will showcase a staggering array of literacies on display as they surf the web, create content, chat nonstop with friends, and so on. Young people are producing and reading more texts than at any other time in human history, and yet those who rule over us have determined that kids cannot read. Such a finding can only reinforce the forgone conclusion of reactionary educational "reformers" – the trouble with schools is teachers, and thus the initiatives we support must focus on teachers and the nebulous concept of "teacher quality."

Teachers are resisting this, of course, but many are doing so by leaving the field altogether – thus once again reinforcing a hyperindividualist logic that one's own complicity in oppression is the primary area in which one must act. Rather than be complicit in the ongoing marginalization of working-class students of color, radical teachers quit. But such moves of quitting leave the oppressive mechanism functioning in the same ways it was before – focusing on our own roles enables larger structural features to retain their hegemonic grip over the totality of schooling in our contemporary neoliberal order. Thus, when a teacher leaves the profession altogether, she is reinforcing the hyperindividualist conception of teachers as predictive of student outcomes.

An Unconventional Conclusion

Even here, as I write this paragraph in the relatively protected academic space of theorizing in scholarly prose, I'm compelled to conclude with something like suggestions or instructions for what others should do with these ideas. I can feel the push toward hyperindividualism even in my work to critique it, such as its hegemonic power and authority. Thus, I conclude with quite the opposite of the norm in educational research. I call on others to locate further examples and instances of hyperindividualism and to imagine possible responses that resist the problems of saviors, solo actors, and determining student futures in our collective struggle to realize the possibilities for a more fully human social reality. And to do so in collectives, mobilizing a reinvigorated and reinvented sense of Freirean (2000) humility, lest we lose ourselves in the hyperindividualist project of determining what can I do. Perhaps it is impossible, but what is called for here is the end of the question "What can I do?"

Rather, those of us in the relatively privileged position of educational researchers and scholars of teaching and learning ought to examine the ways that our programs of teacher education function to support and reinforce hyperindividualism. Our universities make use of many if not all of the same neoliberal projects that P12 schools do – and perhaps greater activity around identifying and naming these projects can offer yet further interventions on the side of radical justice and human flourishing. But I remain deeply troubled at the sheer power of hyperindividualism to shape the ideological contours of not only the conservative right but also the progressivist left. This work complexifies labor in educational spaces by focusing on the ways ideology makes use of any and every available resource to protect and further entrench its *naturalness*. But there is nothing natural about understanding oneself first and primarily as utterly unique and differentiated from all other social actors, past present, and future. Locating and paying attention to moments when we are hailed into such positions offers a glimmer of a way forward. I hope others will seek to articulate such a path for us as a collective body, capable of understanding the vastness of human misery as well as human capacity to offer a new hegemony that (re)structures reality on the side of human flourishing.

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Antiracist Pedagogies in Post-COVID Classrooms: Practical Strategies

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic was a mass trauma experienced by adults and youth alike. In the United States, the pandemic occurred concurrently with a national reckoning with racism. The pandemic additionally exacerbated pre-existing inequalities already experienced by Youth of Color. Post-COVID classrooms will be populated with students who have experienced the mass trauma event of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers may also encounter students who have experienced intensified racial trauma due to the time period and nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-racist pedagogies refer to ways in which racism can be addressed by teachers within the classroom. Antiracist pedagogies have been proposed as a way to address post-COVID-19 racial trauma. A literature review was conducted to investigate previously published literature on antiracist pedagogy to identify the definition, techniques, and promising previous implementation of antiracist pedagogy. This paper posits that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a time of unprecedented trauma and racial stress within the United States and that antiracist pedagogies offer a way in which teachers can address this stress with their students.

Keywords: trauma, antiracism, pedagogies

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a unique intersection of preexisting racial inequality with exacerbated traumatic racism among all Youth of Color (YOC). Due to the mass trauma event that was the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers may face trauma

reactions among students, and potentially particularly among YOC. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified racial trauma by exacerbating racial disparities already existing in American society (Dickinson et al., 2021). Due to this intersection of the pandemic and pre-existing racial trauma, an examination of classroom strategies to address racial trauma is imperative in the conversation about Youths of Color's (YOC) return to the classroom post-COVID-19. Anti-racist pedagogies offer a way by which teachers can address this trauma to best support students academically and socioemotionally. This paper outlines the definition of racial trauma and posits that antiracist pedagogies stand as a concrete way in which teachers can help students heal from the racial trauma exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trauma and Complex Trauma

Trauma can be an experiencing or the witnessing of an event of a disturbing nature, such as sexual assault, a car accident, abuse, witnessing violence, or a physical assault. Trauma can also stem from less evident and more long-term stressors including lack of access to healthcare, housing instability, racism, and nutritional disparities linked to socioeconomic status and racism (Ports, Ford, & Merrick, 2016; Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020; Metzger et al., 2020). Trauma is defined here as experienced or observed "events that overwhelm a person's ability to adapt to life, leading to strong negative emotions that are associated with the degree of experienced or witnessed threat to self" (Phelps & Sperry, 2020, p. F73). Youth are all at risk for traumatic experiences.

Racial Trauma

Research suggests racism can lead to symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Comas-Diaz, 2016; Polanco-Roman, Danies & Anglin, 2016; Robert et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Racial trauma refers to:

a form of race-based stress, refers to People of Color and Indigenous individuals' (POCII) reactions to dangerous events and real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination. Such experiences may include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing racial discrimination toward other POCII. Racial trauma is unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure and re-exposure to race-based stress. (Comas-Diaz et al., 201, p. 249)

An insidious form of racism can occur within the school setting. Racial trauma can manifest in microaggressions in the classroom, conflict with teachers, and unnecessary placement in special education (Diamond & Huguley, 2011; Burleigh & Wilson, 2021; Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2021). Systemic racism can also occur within the larger U.S. schooling context. This includes the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014; Mallett, 2016) and race as a factor within tracking students in vocational programs (Fletcher & Zirkle, 2009; Greene, 2014). This racial trauma has a negative effect on YOC's academic and emotional outcomes (Anderson, Saleem, & Huguley, 2019).

COVID-19: Trauma and Racial Trauma

Students of all racial backgrounds experienced trauma related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While important for public health reasons, social distancing resulted in negative mental health outcomes among many youth due to limiting the interruption of important milestones and lack of availability of common healthy coping skills. Isolation due to social distancing led to anxiety, depression, and stress for many youth (Pappa et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2020). During lockdown periods, young people lost access to healthy coping skills such as visiting family, playing with friends, enjoying activities outside the house (Imran et al., 2020; Cokshi et al., 2021) and were less physically active (Boldt et al., 2021; Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020). Youth further missed

out on social milestones such as graduations, birthday parties, and religious traditions specific to their culture (Imran et al., 2020; Miller, 2020; Montauk & Kuhl, 2020; Wallace et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated racial disparities already existing in American society (CDC, 2020; LeFave & Anderson, 2020; NAACP, 2020; Schneider, 2020). Pre-existing racial trauma combined with COVID-19-related stress can put YOC at higher risk of complex trauma than their White, middle-class peers, (Cohen & Bosk, 2020; Collin-Vézina et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020; Chokshi et al., 2021). Racial trauma has been exacerbated specifically by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of home stress, virtual instruction and access to healthcare. YOC's parents are more likely to lose jobs compared to the parents of their White, middle-class peers (Fortuna et al., 2020; Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020; Yancy, 2020). This loss of income can lead to housing instability and eviction (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020). Additionally, parental stress related to such losses can in turn create additional stress for their children (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017).

Additionally, in 2020, many school districts transitioned to online learning. Many YOC did not have access to technology at home. This disparity in technology access limited minority students' ability to participate in instruction when schools provided education online, thereby exacerbating already existing differences in access to technology (Dooley et al., 2020; Endale, St. Jean, & Birman, 2020; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017; Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020; Miller, 2020; Racine et al., 2020).

Finally, some schools stand as the main source of healthcare for some students. Minority students' healthcare (physical and mental) needs are often primarily met in the school setting (Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020). Pre-existing racial trauma combined with COVID-19-related stress combined can place YOC at higher risk of trauma than their White, middle-class peers (Cohen & Bosk, 2020; Collin-Vézina et al., 2020; Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020; Wong et al., 2020; Chokshi et al., 2021). Ultimately, YOC have poorer access to mental health care despite being at higher risk for trauma (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017), including during

and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Masonbrick & Hurley, 2020).

Antiracist Pedagogy and Trauma-Informed Teaching

Trauma-informed teaching is an approach to education that addresses the psychosocial needs of students to best support their social emotional and academic needs. Developed within the last 20 years, trauma-informed strategies are implemented in schools through preservice teacher education, teaching practices, school climate, and delivery of trauma services within the school (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). This approach is a shift away from deficit models and a movement toward addressing student trauma within larger environmental contexts (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright, 2018).

The term “antiracist pedagogy” can be traced to the early 1980s with the development of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy emphasizes the education of students in their role as citizens to confront inequality. Critical Race Theory, a lens by which to understand and ultimately work toward dismantling racism, was applied to the education field in the 1990s (Matsuda, 1989; West, 1995; Solórzano, 1997). Taking an antiracist stance involves approaching race in a way that rejects the systemic nature of racism (King & Chandler, 2016, p. 4). Antiracist pedagogy challenges simple diversity or multicultural changes made by schools, which “may not be necessarily serving the interests and needs of racially dominated groups” (Alderman et al., 2019, p. 187). Specific antiracist pedagogy techniques including teaching countertexts and encouraging student activism. Teaching countertexts refers to including perspectives outside of the common Western canon and narrative. For example, during a lesson about slavery, including slave writings in addition to a textbook written by a white author (Accurso & Mizell, 2020). In terms of encouraging student activism, teachers can inform students of the importance of civic engagement and encourage students to fight oppression in their own lives (Lopez, 2009).

Importantly, antiracist pedagogy continues outside the classroom. As stated by Kishimoto (2018):

Antiracist pedagogy is not about simply incorporating racial content into courses,

curriculum, and discipline. It is also about how one teaches, even in courses where race is not the subject matter. It begins with the faculty’s awareness and self-reflection of their social position and leads to application of this analysis in their teaching, but also in their discipline, research, and departmental, university, and community work. In other words, antiracist pedagogy is an organizing effort for institutional and social change that is much broader than teaching in the classroom. (p. 540)

Self-reflection by teachers themselves is an important aspect of antiracist pedagogy (Kailin, 2002; Solomon, 2002; Young & Laible, 2000). Learning to be antiracist “is a continual (lifelong) process” (Young & Laible, 2000, p. 30) in which educators identify how their own view, beliefs, and racial identity influence their role in oppression (Solomon, 2002; Seidl, 2007; Graff, 2010; Utt & Tochluk, 2016). This relates to trauma-informed teaching, which identifies teachers as central figures within a student’s living environment (Thomas, Crosby & Vanderhar, 2019). Antiracist learning, therefore, requires work outside of the classroom by students and teachers alike. Students and educators must engage in self-reflection on their privilege while working toward seeing the world from the perspective of others (Fritzsche, 2022).

Teacher Self-reflection

Teachers who are members of the dominant group may not be able to recognize the often subtle, complex, and ambiguous ways in which racism manifests in the lives of non-dominant group members. In fact, research indicates subtle forms of racism can have an even greater negative psychological impact than more overt racist acts (Edwards, 2017). This contrasts from the approach of “I don’t see color” and “I’m colorblind,” which research indicates are neither realistic nor helpful approaches to race (Burkard & Knox, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Sue, 2013; Plaut et al., 2018).

Implicit bias is something on which teachers must reflect to challenge racism within the classroom. Implicit bias refers to the unconscious judgements we make about people based on gender and race. Examining one’s own implicit bias is an important step to help YOC recover from trauma. Harvard University’s Project Implicit is a useful tool to address an individual’s

personal implicit biases. Project Implicit is an online test to assess unconscious biases (Harvard Project Implicit, 2021).

Self-reflection activities, such as teachers writing their own autobiography through the lens of how race influenced their outlook and development, can also be a useful strategy (Kailin, 2002, p. 127). Pre-service training and professional development are also recommended as ways to address and combat racial trauma within the classroom (Neville, 2020; Shah & Coles, 2020; Kubota, 2021).

Applying Antiracist Pedagogy: Instructional Practice, Curriculum Selection, and Class

Instructional Practice

There are various ways in which teachers can change instructional practice to include antiracist pedagogies, thereby addressing racial trauma within the classroom. Teachers can incorporate the topic of systemic racism into lessons by including counter storytelling, confronting controversial topics, addressing inequality, and encouraging discussion on the definition of racism and who benefits from racism (Misco & Shiveley, 2016; Kishimoto, 2018). Within the last two years, several states' legislators have restricted the topic of Critical Race Theory within classrooms (Schwartz, 2022; Kim, 2021; Green, 2022). Antiracist pedagogy is a concrete method by which teachers can incorporate counter-curriculum revision and other practices into the classroom without necessarily mentioning Critical Race Theory. The synthesis of antiracist and trauma-informed and antiracist pedagogies has the potential to be both healing and powerful.

Curriculum Selection

There are a variety of ways in which educators can apply antiracist pedagogies through curriculum selection. For example, educators can select ELA reading material that is not White Eurocentric (Sealy-Ruiz, 2019; Kubota, 2021; Rushek & Seylar, 2022). Teachers can replace or supplement content with counter storytelling texts written by People of Color and Indigenous Individuals (POCII) (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Accurso & Mizell, 2020; Kubota,

2021) to make curriculum more culturally and linguistically sustaining (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2017). Teachers may incorporate counter storytelling in history lessons about race by incorporating historical documents written by People of Color and Indigenous Individuals (POCII) (Alderman et al., 2019). An antiracist approach can be applied to a geography lesson by identifying countries by their specific name and not group countries into one category such as "The Middle East," "Africa," or "Asia" (Alderman et al., 2019). The teaching of subjects utilizing a lens of oppression can also be an effective strategy for addressing racial trauma within the classroom (Sinclair & de Fonseka, 2022).

Classroom Discussion

Since 2020, there has been an increase in the televised deaths of POCII, anti-Asian racist attacks, and a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to these attacks (Kubota 2021). The civil unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity for educators to explore their own dedication to antiracist pedagogy (Smith, 2020; Bae, 2022). Encouraging discussion of challenging topics ideally occurs through dialogic means and not top-down lecturing with the goal of "not necessarily to reach a consensus or to find a single right answer, but rather to explore how views, meanings, politics, and economic conditions produce and reproduce structures of racial inequality" (Kubota, 2021). Topics can include the Black Lives Matter movement (Kubota, 2021; Maraj, 2022) and the killing unarmed citizens of color including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks (Humphrey & Davis, 2021; Maraj, 2022), the Monterey Park mass shooting (Luo, 2023), and the Asian female spa workers in Atlanta, GA (Fausset et al., 2021).

Results Following Previous Natural Disasters

Research examining class discussion, curriculum selection, and instruction following natural disasters indicates these three approaches can reduce trauma symptoms in middle grade students following a natural disaster. While not definitionally a natural disaster, the COVID-19 pandemic was a national crisis of a virologic base. The natural disasters of the 1997 Red River Valley and Hurricane Katrina are similar in some ways

to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like the COVID-19 pandemic, both disasters involved the disruption of school secondary to a naturally occurring crisis. Hurricane Katrina also negatively affected YOC to a greater extent than their White, middle-class peers, much like the COVID-19 pandemic. These similarities hold promise that classroom changes can effectively address post-COVID-19 trauma in students.

For example, Zevenbergen et al. (2000) examined trauma symptoms and overall emotional functioning in students following the 1997 Red River Valley Flood in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Teachers of these students reported integrating into the curriculum material related to the flood improved student functioning. Alvarez (2010) similarly found the integration of Hurricane Katrina into the post-Katrina curriculum led to a decrease in externalized stress behavior among students. Peek and Richardson (2010) examined post-Katrina functioning in Black students ages 7-18 displaced by the hurricane. Teachers encouraged the students to write about their experiences in the hurricane. Teachers were also conscious of cultural sensitivity throughout the assignments. The combination of writing assignments and cultural sensitivity indicated a decrease in students self-reported feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Importantly, in each of these studies (Zevenbergen et al., 2000; Alvarez, 2010; Peek & Richardson, 2010) the curriculum modifications took the form of writing prompts, drawing pictures, and discussion related to

the children's experiences of the natural disasters. No lessons involved images of dead bodies of Black or Brown people, which has been shown to be traumatizing to YOC (Downs, 2016; Mills, 2020; Tillet, 2020).

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a mass trauma event for adults and children alike. The years of the pandemic occurred against the backdrop of a national reckoning with race and the media representation of violent crimes against POCII. The pandemic has also led to a unique exacerbation of racial trauma for POCII.

As students return to classrooms, teachers will encounter this racial trauma experienced by their students. As the trauma-informed school movement has exemplified, teachers can play a unique role in addressing trauma experienced by students. Antiracist pedagogies offer concrete strategies through which teachers can modify their own curricular choices and instructional strategies to enhance learning material as students cope with aftereffects of the pandemic and their own responses to national conversations about racism.

Discussing challenging topics in class, making changes to curriculum, counter storytelling and self-reflection are important ways educators can best support students. Ultimately, teachers are in a unique position to offer healing and restorative strategies during these challenging times.

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