



March 2023

## Teaching for Social Justice in a Highly Politicized Historical Moment

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### Recommended Citation

Kasprisin, Lorraine (2023) "Teaching for Social Justice in a Highly Politicized Historical Moment," *Journal of Educational Controversy*. Vol. 15: No. 1, Article 9.  
Available at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/jec/vol15/iss1/9>

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## EDITORIAL

### **Teaching for Social Justice in a Highly Politicized Historical Moment**

Lorraine Kasprisin, editor

The theme for this Volume 15 issue, “Teaching for Social Justice in a Highly Politicized Historical Moment,” is a continuation of a conversation that began in two earlier issues. In Volume 12, we explored the larger institutional structures that maintain inequalities and racism with the theme, “Black Lives Matter and the Education Industrial Complex.” That was followed with an inquiry in Volume 14 on the role that the past plays in wrongs in the present and the issues it raises in our attempts at seeking reconciliation in “The Ethics of Memory: What Does it Mean to Apologize for Historical Wrongs.” The current issue takes a practical turn and asks authors to explore ways of teaching for social justice and anti-racism, especially, at a time when legislatures are censoring and undercutting the efforts of schools and teachers. (Several posts on the blog attached to this journal describe the many pieces of legislation that various states have passed.)

We posed the controversy in the following scenario that authors were asked to address:

As the nation begins to reckon with its racial past, it is now experiencing a backlash by some states that are implementing laws and policies that will target how civics education, controversial topics, and divisive issues will be discussed from kindergarten through higher education. From restrictions on the teaching of academic theories that analyze systemic racism to limiting other race-related discussions in the classroom, actions by these states pose not only a challenge and a danger to traditional academic freedom but also to the very definition of the role of education in a democratic society.

This issue of the *Journal of Educational Controversy* asks authors to contribute their thoughts on issues such as:

1. How should racism be appropriately addressed at different age levels and the college classroom? What social, historical, political, and cultural understandings should be brought to bear on the conversation? How do we defend the educational significance of the choices we make? How do we act in proactive ways to engage in such work so that we are not forced to be reactive?
2. How are we to understand the political nature of the attacks against theories like Critical Race Theory and other current political actions by states to restrict and censor discussions on race in order for us to counter them more effectively? What political dynamics and historical precedents are at play? Can incidents from the past illuminate a response today?
3. How should university professors prepare the next generation of teachers in confronting these issues?

4. What would it look like if a college of education took on the work of dismantling structural racism?

Many of the authors shared reflections on their own experiences and practices while others tried to bring some conceptual clarity to the research by examining the language and concepts employed. While most of the articles discuss the issue from the viewpoint of tensions in the United States, one article discusses the tensions that are occurring in schools in Israel.

Below are the authors' abstracts of the papers that are published in this issue:

**The Sociohistorically Situated and Structurally Central Nature of Race: Toward an Analytic of Research regarding Race and Racism**, Rolf Straubhaar (Texas State University - San Marcos)

In a response to Wacquant's (1997) call for "an analytic of racial domination" (p. 230) to theorize about race and racism, this conceptual article puts forward one such analytic. This analytic is based principally on the continued centrality of race in society, the recognition that racism is always shaped by particular sociohistorical factors, and the importance of documenting racism's contextual intersectionality with class, gender and other elements of social structure through academic inquiry focused on both discourse and measurable action as data for racial analysis.

**"Teaching in a War Zone": A Collective Reflection on Learning from a Diversity Course in Contentious Times**, Elena Aydarova (Auburn University), Jacob Kelley (Auburn University), Kristen Daugherty (Auburn University)

Diversity courses in teacher education often become sites of conflict and contestation. Numerous proposals have been put forward on how to address these conflicts and contestations through pedagogical interventions and teaching innovations. However, such proposals rarely take into account the impact of broader sociopolitical forces on classroom interactions and learning. In this collective reflection, we document our experiences of navigating a diversity course in highly contentious times when anti-critical race theory campaigns resulted in widespread bans on the teaching of "divisive concepts." We explore critical events and challenging situations to capture the erosion of civility and engagement with evidence. In the context of society-wide attacks on truth, we call on educators, researchers, and advocates to raise their voices in public and political arenas to sustain democracy.

**Stories Read and Told in an Antiracist Teaching Book Club**, Jennifer Ervin (University of Georgia), Madison Gannon (University of Georgia)

This manuscript explores the stories both read and told by graduate students and preservice teachers in an antiracist teaching book club. Thinking with critical and engaged pedagogy, the researchers use narrative inquiry to explore how the book club supported White female preservice teachers' understandings of antiracist pedagogy in English language arts classrooms. The themes that the authors explore through these narratives include the ways that both teacher and student identities are at the forefront of enacting antiracist pedagogy, how teachers receive

and seek support for implementing antiracist pedagogy, and what pedagogical decisions are needed when intentionally planning to engage with antiracist pedagogy in ELA classes.

**A critically conscious analysis of institutionalized racism in teacher education: Imagining anti-racist teacher preparation spaces**, Tatiana Joseph, Jennifer Brownson, Kristine Lize, Elizabeth Drame (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Laura Owens

Teacher education scholars serving five different teacher education license programs came together to collectively examine this question: What would it look like if a college of education took on the work of revealing and dismantling structural racism? Using Critical Consciousness theory, we analyzed how structural racism is embedded in teacher education on both a macro systems level and a micro program level. First, we discuss what we know about how institutionalized racism is prevalent within teacher preparation spaces. Then, we take a focused look at some of our programs within our own school of education. More specifically, we explored both how structural racism showed up in our individual programs and how we have each attempted to disrupt it in the areas of student recruitment, admissions, retention, faculty diversity, curriculum experiences, and exit assessments/criteria. We end with a potential roadmap for furthering our efforts to disrupt structural racism that emerged from our lessons learned.

**Troubling the Null Curriculum through a Multiple-Perspectives Pedagogy: A Critical Dialogue Between Two Equity-Minded Teacher Educators**, Rachel Endo (UW Tacoma), Deb Sheffer (Hamline University)

In this article, the authors explore the ways by which they, as equity-minded teacher educators, have introduced predominantly White pre-service teachers to the notion of a multiple-perspectives pedagogy as a vehicle to promote critical thinking and multicultural integration. The conceptual framework charts a new course for theorizing the various ideological challenges that arise when attempting to model a multiple-perspectives pedagogy to critique various aspects of the null curriculum in PK-12 and teacher education as it relates to integrating multicultural perspectives. Through critical reflection and dialogic interviews, the authors discuss how they have negotiated the various challenges and possibilities of implementing a multiple-perspectives pedagogical approach in teacher-education courses to critique the null curriculum. Implications are offered for practice and theory.

**On the continuity of learning, teaching, schooling: Mead's educational proposal, from the perspective of decolonization and Land/place-based education**, Cary Campbell Dr. (Simon Fraser University)

In her 1943 "Our Educational Emphases," Margaret Mead inquired: What constitutes education in "the broadest sense" of the term, as a continuing human process. More specifically, she asked, how and from what basis can we understand the educational processes of traditional/long-standing/Indigenous societies as continuous with the forms of education practiced in modern industrialized society? In short, Mead proposes that we recognize the essential continuity of learning, teaching, and schooling across all human societies. In this article, I explore the controversies that Mead's proposal raises for contemporary, intersecting

discourses on decolonization, Indigenous education, and place- and Land-based education. I argue that Mead's call alerts us to two major impediments to the widespread flourishing of decolonized, place/Land-based education, both of which are deeply intertwined with the effects and ongoing processes of colonization and the forms of anti-Indigeneity implicit in mainstream notions and practices of schooling. The first impediment concerns the external demands for efficiency and productivity placed upon schools, teachers, and learners; the second concerns the interior (personal/spiritual/cognitive) manifestations of colonization that impact upon our ability to understand Land and place as educationally significant in the first place (Land/place as school). In conclusion, I outline the significance of this reconceptualization for the possibility and controversies of decolonized, place- and Land-based education.

**Dissonance as an Educational Tool for Coping with Students' Racist Attitudes**, Adar Cohen (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Teachers in multicultural societies that are beset by severe rifts and political polarization encounter students who express racist and extreme attitudes. According to the students' dichotomous views, anyone who is different from them poses a threat, and teachers find it difficult to overcome this challenge solely with moralistic utterances. Anger, shock, and punishment do not help change the students' opinions; they often have the opposite effect. This article proposes, instead, that teachers use dissonance as a tool for helping students rid themselves of their dichotomous views and become accustomed to complex thinking about society. On the basis of an educational ethnographic study, the article presents various pedagogical approaches and examples of how to accomplish this by drawing on the curriculum content, facilitating a class discussion, and using the teacher's identity. The article emphasizes that reducing the students' resistance to dissonance depends greatly on teachers' using empathy, creating a feeling of identification, and building a relationship of trust with the class.