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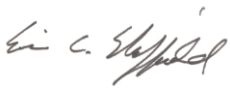
Colleagues and Friends of the Academy:

First and foremost, we hope all our readers are staying well—the pandemic has certainly shifted our lived experience—together and socially distanced. Secondly, and in light of these health concerns, the fall Academy conference slated for Cleveland has been postponed for a year. And, we are mulling over the Spring event planned for Charleston. Stay tuned for updates.

Typically, it is here that we preview what is included in the present issue of the journal. However, given the more than 700,000 victims of COVID-19 worldwide and the murder of George Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis, we will use this space to take a moment of silence in memory of victims of both viruses: COVID-19 and Institutional Racism that lead to George Floyd's murder and numerous others before and after.

PAX,



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Teaching Affirmative Action in the Classroom: Locating Justice and Interrogating Meritocracy

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Abstract

Affirmative action in education is once again in the media and cultural spotlight. The Trump administration, along with a decidedly rightward shift on the Supreme Court, signal a bleak outlook for affirmative action policies in higher education. However, as educators, we can also use this historical moment to have robust and critical conversations in our classrooms centered on advancing justice and interrogating the polemics of meritocracy–a concept that undergirds much of the affirmative action narrative. This paper seeks to provide social justice-oriented educators with the critical tools necessary to have meaningful classroom conversations about the historical and contemporary narrative of the affirmative action debate.

Keywords: *Meritocracy, College Access, Affirmative Action*

Introduction

Affirmative action as an admissions practice lives on after the Supreme Court's decision in *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2016). However, the sustainability of race positive considerations in education continues to hang in the balance against a never-ending headwind of anti-affirmative action legal assaults. While the *Fisher* dispute lingered for years in the court system waiting for its final verdict, two other complaints against race positive admissions were filed against Harvard and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Project on Fair, 2015). Notwithstanding the shelf life of the *Fisher* decision, the outlook for affirmative action in admissions policy looks bleak. The Trump administration has played a significant role in constructing a Supreme Court and Federal Circuit Courts that looks to turn decidedly rightward, thus further emboldening anti-affirmative action crusaders to challenge affirmative action practices. Nevertheless, the vitality of the affirmative action debate in our classrooms should not singularly be tied to changing political and judicial headwinds. Critical questions educators must confront in our classroom is not just whether or not we talk about affirmative action, but *how*. Reflective of the research literature and public discourse on affirmative action, *how* we talk about affirmative action reveals itself to be as controversial as the topic itself. In the research literature, topics surveyed have ranged from the applicability of "strict scrutiny" as a legal standard to whether or not affirmative action "harms" minorities (See Anderson, 2002; Bhagwat, 2002; Taylor & Sander, 2012). Our public discourse has similarly diverged without much clarity. For instance, opponents of affirmative action have argued Asian Americans must score hundreds of points

more than other minority applicants to receive admissions (Asian American Coalition, 2016). Additionally, white applicants have claimed reverse racism at the alleged unfair double review standards (*Regents of the Univ. of California v. Bakke*, 1978; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Fisher v. Univ. of Texas*, 2013). The inability of the academic literature to agree on how we talk about affirmative action has surely contributed to our disjointed and often antagonistic public discourse. While similar education reforms are spreading globally, the way in which they translate into local policy practices is based on constant and active reinterpretation and modification by local political actors (Verger, 2014). Nevertheless, scholarly attention on narratives in education policy, and especially narratives about charter schools in local contexts, has been limited. This study aims to fill this gap by relying on the recently developed Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) approach, which offers guidelines to systematically study the narrative elements and strategies that policy actors use to influence policy debates (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Focusing on editorials and op-eds in local newspapers, this study asks: How did the editorials and op-ed articles in local newspapers cover charter schools prior to adoption of the legislation? Specifically, is it possible to identify core structural elements, e.g., setting, characters, plot, and morals of policy stories in these narratives? Do these elements differ by endorsed policy solution? The paper starts with a brief introduction of the policy issue and the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), followed by a discussion of the methodological approach and primary findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of policy implications, observations about convergence and divergence between local narratives and nationwide charter politics, and suggestions for future research.

This article argues to have a meaningful conversation about affirmative action, we should start the conversation not on the supposed benefits or harms of affirmative action, but by investigating a fundamental concept that undergirds the affirmative action debate: meritocracy. In the often-antagonistic affirmative action research and public debates, meritocracy is commonly central to arguments for or against the merits of affirmative action policy. However, the ideal of meritocracy often escapes critical investigation. Meritocracy is usually at least tangentially related to arguments from both opponents and proponents of affirmative action policy. Opponents argue race based affirmative action policies harms otherwise meritocratic review systems based on quantitative metrics such as GPA and standardize test scores such as the SAT or ACT (Son & Leanne et. al, 2002). Proponents often argue affirmative action policies "level" the playing field, thus ensuring the required parameters toward a more meaningful meritocracy (Crosby, 1994). The antagonism of these differing arguments notwithstanding, they both invoke and centralize the importance of meritocracy to the affirmative action debate. Therefore, I argue for our classrooms to have meaningful conversations on racial justice, opportunity, and the democratic potential of education, we should utilize affirmative action as a discursive tool to interrogate meritocracy, not the other way around.

In the first section, I survey the varied and often disjointed paths the affirmative action debate has taken in public policy, the research literature, and our public discourse. In doing so, I argue the inability for the affirmative action debate to have a semblance of unity—*how* we discuss affirmative action—is intricately connected to a public discourse that borders on racial hysteria and stereotyped antagonism for the "other" (read: people of color). The second section discusses the impetus for conceptions of meritocracy to be rooted in social structures and material life, as opposed to ideological conversations *sans* social history and class considerations. I then identify two common arguments against affirmative action to show that meritocratic ideals, as opposed to social and material impacts on merit, critically undergirds the affirmative action

debate. In the third section, I look at specific aspects of the admissions process to further indict the taken for granted hegemony of meritocracy. Here, I specifically engage with how social class and structural privileges destroy ideological conceptions of meritocracy and any possibility of educational equality. Finally, in section four, finding common ground in *how* we talk about affirmative action has the potential to allow our classrooms and students to engage critically, not antagonistically. I offer student survey results coupled with a classroom exercise on affirmative action to suggest that common ground may not be as distant as the politicized public and policy debate. The significance of an ongoing affirmative action discussion in our classrooms supports the full democratic potential of our schools, policies, and implementation.

Affirmative Action in Flux

The first institutionally initiated affirmative action policy adjudicated by the Supreme Court did not focus on educational access or college admissions, but on political participation in local and state elections. In *United Jewish Organization v. Carey* (*UJO*) (1977), the state of New York reapportioned an assembly district in Kings County in order to establish a 65% non-white voting majority. The state of New York's reapportionment was an affirmative action because it explicitly contained a racial threshold to prevent whites from consistently out-voting other minority groups within the district. Before the state of New York's affirmative action, a community of about thirty thousand Hasidic Jews lived entirely within one assembly district. The result of the reapportionment split the Hasidic Jewish community roughly in two adjoining districts. Though the policy adversely impacted the Jewish community of Williamsburg, the Court nevertheless did not find any statutory or constitutional violation. The *UJO* court ruled the new districts did not "fence out" the Jewish community from political participation relative to their representation within the new districts. Contemporaneously with the *UJO* decision, the Supreme Court also adjudicated an affirmative action challenge in education.

In *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), the UC Davis medical school established an admissions quota of accepting at least 16 minority students out of a class of 100. The quota-set-a-side affirmative action was challenged on the grounds the policy made 86 admissions seats available to whites, as opposed to 100 for minorities. The verdict in *Bakke* was seen as a compromise between liberal and conservative justices. The medical school's quota system was declared unconstitutional on equal protection grounds under the Fourteenth Amendment. However, a plurality of the Justices nevertheless recognized the constitutionality of affirmative action policies in education by accepting "diversity" as a permissible justification for using race in policy making. Common in both *UJO* and *Bakke* is the implementation of a quota threshold to ensure a minimum number of minority representation. However, within less than two years, the permissibility of affirmative action policy from a legal standpoint began to fracture. These two early affirmative action cases heard by the same 9 justices signified the marked cleavages in ideological approach and inconsistency surrounding policies that on its face utilize race as a mechanism to guaranteeing increased minority participation.

In comparison to the Supreme Court, the research literature has not fared much better in terms of consistency and clarity. The nebulous nature of the "diversity" rationale has in various ways further complicated the affirmative action debate. Perhaps the most prominent argument against affirmative action is Sander and Taylor's (2012) "mismatch" theory. Mismatch theory argues that when highly selective college and universities "lower" their admissions standards in order to bring in "less qualified" minority students, these students are ill prepared to succeed in

a highly competitive environment. As a result, Sander and Taylor argue, minority students are better off attending less selective schools where their talents better "match" with the academic rigor. The mismatch theory has come under intense criticism by researchers who argue Sander and Taylor's analysis lacks context and nuance (Jaschik, 2013; Kurlaender & Grodsky, 2013). For instance, although minority students admitted under affirmative action programs disproportionately end up in lower quartiles of their graduating classes, they nevertheless graduate (Bowen & Bok, 1998). In addition, affirmative action admits often come from educational backgrounds that are incomparable to more privileged admits. As a result, student performance throughout the course of their college careers is often a reflection of their educational trajectory, as opposed to some indicator of inherent academic aptitude. Additionally, selective schools who utilize affirmative action nevertheless do not admit students who, in the schools' opinion, are completely unqualified or will be unable to succeed. In addition to utilizing affirmative action, selective schools also invest in specific academic programs and initiatives intended to provide students with significant resources to excel throughout their academic years (Blum, 2017). The existence of these programs may play as large a role in student success over a four-year period in comparison to whether or not the modest use of racial considerations in admissions determines a students' success.

Despite evidence that at least complicate Sander and Taylor's work, mismatch theory has achieved an immense amount of support beyond the academic research literature. We can begin at the highest level of judicial policy intervention. Conservative Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas has routinely cited Sander and Taylor's work in his opposition to affirmative action policy (See *Grutter v. Bollinger,* 2003; *Fisher v. Univ. of Texas,* 2013). Justice Thomas cites mismatch theory not as a legal objection to affirmative action, but as a commentary on the inherent wisdom of affirmative action. In his opinion endorsing the arguments of mismatch theory, Justice Thomas suggests affirmative action "stamps blacks and Hispanics with a badge of inferiority" (Thomas J. concurring, *Fisher v. Univ. of Texas,* 2013, pg. 19). The late Antonin Scalia has emanated ideals of mismatch theory not only in his writings (Scalia, 1991), but casually from his position sitting on the Court's bench. During oral arguments from the Fisher (2016) case, Justice Scalia openly questioned whether minority students would be better off attending less competitive schools with a slower track and more appropriate with their academic credentials. In addition, Justice Scalia quipped that many of the nations" prominent black scientist and doctors did not attend highly selective institutions (Friedersdorf, 2015). Echoing the antagonism that conservatives on the Supreme Court have for race positive admissions, Chief Justice Roberts dismissively asked, "What unique perspective does a minority student bring to a physics class?" (Isler, 2015). Collectively, the conservative justices not only embrace mismatch theory as a weapon to question the wisdom of affirmative action, but go one step further by questioning the nebulous diversity rationale that ultimately would topple the entire legal edifice of affirmative action.

Remnants of Sander and Taylor's mismatch argument can also be found in public debates on affirmative action. The technical elements of the mismatch argument focus on whether or not minority students can succeed in highly competitive academic environments, and if students would be better served attending less competitive schools (Sander & Taylor, 2012b). However, there is also a more visceral question of mismatch theory: whether or not affirmative action students "deserve" their spots at competitive schools. Central to the question of whether or not minority students "deserve" their spots is the presumption of meritocracy in all areas such as

student high school experience, the application process, and to the actual decision-making process by college admission offices. It is through this presumption of meritocracy where anti-affirmative action arguments gain the most capital in the public discourse. For as long as the Supreme Court has confronted affirmative action decisions in education, meritocratic arguments of fairness—and its dialectic twin unfairness—have been discursive mainstays.

Meritocracy: Ideal and Application

Anti-affirmative action arguments often centrally invoke ideals of meritocracy. From more general ideological differences, to specific policy objections, the importance of meritocracy as a foundational ideal is ever present. From St. John de Crèvecœur's (1957) letters from an American farmer, to Horatio Alger's bootstrapping tales (see Alger, 1985), to Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech, the most sustaining significance of these historical examples is that they allegedly project a desired social organization that is ideal for all people without discrimination. This is not to say that social inequality does not exist. Rather, the existence of social inequality is a result of individual or collective "merit", rather than a product of subordinating social structures. Therefore, a truly meritocratic system ensures consequences and outcomes for people that will in fact be inequitable as a result of "the content of their character," or more specifically, the value of personal merit. Perhaps in is uncontroversial to suggest that the concept of meritocracy is as old as the American republic—St. John de Crèvecœur's letters before the American revolution should attest to this. Nevertheless, meritocratic ideals are not without fundamental disagreements.

For instance, Dr. King's I have a dream speech was aspirational and forward looking, rather than any contemporary observation of society. That is, he was imagining a meritocratic society where his children would not suffer discrimination due to the color of their skin. In fact, he spent a significant portion of his famous speech excoriating the real and material consequence of blackness against a white supremacist social organization. Although meritocratic arguments often invoke ideals and conceptual frames of equality, it would be a mistake to think of merit as divorced from social circumstances. In other words, merit is real to the extent that it has tangible manifestations in the form of institutional and structural opportunities. The emphasis on structure and institutional opportunity is captured in Fishkin's (2013) Bottlenecks. Fishkin's concept of bottlenecks allows for an engagement of meritocracy from a structural vantage point where social opportunity becomes the centralized point of departure, rather than reductionist ideological battles sans material analysis. Pertaining to equal opportunity, Fishkin defines Bottlenecks as "a narrow place in the opportunity structure through which one must pass in order to successfully pursue a wide range of valued goals" (pg. 13). Fishkin identifies qualification, developmental, and instrumental as three areas of bottlenecks where those without the "right" kind of qualifications or instrumentalities are often squeezed out of opportunities. For instance, the most common instrumental good is of course money. Therefore, social opportunities that heavily require substantial amounts of money to pass through the bottleneck will naturally prevent the economically disadvantaged from advancing, thereby turning the instrumentality of money into a social bottleneck pass-through card.

Specifically, in educational scholarship, Howe (2015) has also identified the dangers of invoking ideals of educational equality and meritocratic conceptions removed from considerations of social class. First, Howe challenges the presumption that educational equality in the US

is meritocratic. Due to this hegemonic educational ethos, Howe observes that the unequal distribution of educational "goods" is seen positively, as a consequence of merit and personal industry. However, Howe argues that the dominant conception is largely ideological removed from considerations of social class and everyday material realities. Therefore, as a matter of policy practice, the meritocratic conception unequally divides the spoils of educational privilege based largely on the effects of class. The educational impact is sadly the exact opposite of the dominant educational meritocratic ideal. In other words, instead of working towards educational equality, a meritocratic conception sans consideration of social class exacerbates existing social inequality—made worse under the guise of meritorious competition. This engagement of meritocracy and equal opportunity is not meant to be exhaustive. However, it serves the fundamental purpose that invocations of meritocratic concepts or ideals of equal opportunity should be grounded in analyses of what Fishkin might call structural opportunities, or Howe's emphasis on examinations of social class. As the historical anti-affirmative action cases show, neither of these concerns feature prominently –if at all.

In the early *Bakke* decision, Allan Bakke's anti-affirmative action argument rested on the strength of his GPA and MCAT score in comparison to other accepted minority students who populated the medical school's special admissions quota program. Bakke's cumulative measurements were not only substantially higher than admitted minority students, his scores were also in the upper quartile of all admitted white students. As Liu (2002) has pointed out, Bakke should have received admissions to the medical school regardless of the minority quota program because he scored better than many admitted white students. Despite Bakke's high quantitative metrics, two factors did work against his application: his advanced age and negative interview evaluation. Together, these combined factors muddied Bakke's application prospects and his admissibility was no longer as clear cut as simply comparing his scores to those of admitted students. A more nuanced investigation of Bakke's case does not necessarily reveal any hidden truths of the admissions process. Rather, selective admissions are much more comprehensive than the reductionist depictions of anti-affirmative action crusaders (See University of California Admissions, 2014). That is, although GPA and standardize test scores are important, they are not the only elements than make up the entire calculus of the admissions process. However, the potential fallacy of ignoring important evaluative elements of admissions has not prevented opponents from making similar anti-affirmative action arguments. A full three decades after the *Bakke* decision, Abigail Fisher echoed Bakke's claim of reverse racism against the University of Texas" race-positive holistic admissions policy. In a widely circulated YouTube video produced by Fisher's legal team, she proclaims:

> There were people in my class with lower grades who weren't in all the activities I was in, who were being accepted into UT, and the only other difference between us was the color of our skin. I was taught from the time I was a little girl that any kind of discrimination was wrong. And for an institution of higher learning to act this way makes no sense to me. What kind of example does it set for others? (Hannah-Jones, 2013)

It is not difficult to feel sympathetic for Abigail Fisher. She was carefully selected by the Project for Fair Representation, a conservative legal defense fund, precisely because she allegedly represented everything that was wrong about affirmative action. However, sympathies are justified if only the facts of her reverse-racism claim were true. As was the case with Allan

Bakke, Fisher's admissions process went beyond the simplicities of objective measures. Conspicuously absent from her comment is any mention of whether or not she felt her admissions essay statement was better than other minority students. Surely, the essay requirement of Fisher's application is much more difficult to quantify as the difference in GPA, SAT, or number of extracurricular activities. Like Bakke's argument, Fisher's emotional plea against race positive considerations reduces the entire admissions process down to simplistic measurements. Further complicating Fisher's case is a peculiar revelation highlighted by ProPublica's Hannah-Jones (*ibid*). Hannah-Jones reveals that even when measuring Fisher's tangible qualifications for admissions to the University of Texas, (i.e. GPA and SAT scores, she was not a competitive candidate for Texas" flagship university).

The false presumption of meritocracy is not limited to spurned white applicants. A coalition of 64 Asian American groups has filed a complaint against Harvard alleging an unfair admissions standard against Asian American applicants (Rosenberg, 2016). The group alleges that on average, Asian American applicants must score 140 points higher on the SAT than whites, 270 higher than Latinos, and 450 points higher than African American students for admissions (Asian American Coalition, 2016). These numbers would on its face appear to be unfair to Asian Americans if the only admissions metric was a student's SAT score. Admissions to highly selective schools stopped pivoting on objective measures such as GPA and SAT scores long ago. In an interview for *Getting In* (Paul, 1995), Harvard Dean of Admissions William Fitzsimmons suggested his office could have filled an entire entering freshmen class with valedictorians or students with perfect SAT scores. Of course, Harvard, nor any other schools, have never done this. What Harvard and other selective institutions strive for with every new Freshman class is one that is well-rounded and reflects, what Cohen (2015) calls, the key niche interests of each university. These niche interests can be intricately related to race in achieving a critical mass of diversity. However, other niche interests are not directly related to race, such as admitting legacies of alumni, maintaining athletic programs that require more flexible admission standards for athletes[1], or in the rare circumstance, seeking out the wealthy and famous who can endow buildings and professorships (Stevens, 2007). Therefore, it is not that Asian Americans must score a certain amount higher on the SAT than other applicants, but Harvard and other selective Universities are not always interested in only selecting the highest students defined by quantitative metrics when they seek to fill other niche interests in constructing a well-round student body.

There are two main assumptions of the anti-affirmative action position that permeate through these anti-affirmative action complaints. First, minority affirmative action admits are undeserving of their spots at the expense of more deserving candidates—usually whites, but now also Asian Americans (see Asian American Coalition, 2016; Hannah-Jones, 2013). Secondly, and most importantly, affirmative action programs uproot, undermine, or altogether destroy meritocracy. Though I separate these two assumptions for the sake of clarity, they are intricately entwined in discursive deployment. For instance, when Allan Bakke and Abigail Fisher argued against affirmative action by presenting their scores and measurable qualifications, they staked a claim to a perceived admissions spot that is "unfairly" given to someone else. The perception of fairness and unfairness lies at the root of the aforementioned Asian American objection to

1. Although legacy and athletic preferential admissions may not have a *prima facie* connection to race, it is nevertheless entwined in racial consequences. Legacy admits are predominantly white. In addition, athletic admits must be considered by looking at the composition of the entire athletic department. That is, considering all varsity sponsored sports, white student athletes consistently constitute a majority of collegiate athletic departments—except for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

affirmative action based on SAT differential. Despite numerous evidentiary elements that undermine a simplistic reduction of the admissions process as deterministic based only on the SAT, a straightforward comparison of SAT scores between admits requires an acquiescence to some degree of equality. Polemics notwithstanding, colleges and universities overwhelmingly continue to utilize SAT and ACT scores precisely because some standardize—read: meritocratic—measure is needed to evaluate a perpetually increasing diverse applicant pool. Whether schools should emphasize the importance of standardize test scores more or less is a separate question. What should be clear is the intrinsic reliance on some degree of meritocracy from all perspectives of the affirmative action discussion. As a result, it is the notions of meritocracy and fairness in standardization that undergird the affirmative action debate, rather than affirmative action itself, that require the most exacting scrutiny.

The Discontents of Admissions

From a practical standpoint, the push towards standardization as a prerequisite in making admissions decision is understandable. All colleges and universities, not just the highly selective, require some streamline methodology to review the thousands, and often tens of thousands of applicants every year. For instance, during the admission cycle for the class of 2021, three University of California schools (Los Angeles, San Diego, Berkeley) each received more than one hundred thousand applicants (Song, 2016). In contrast to large public universities, smaller private schools receive a much smaller number of applications. A selective private liberal arts college would receive anywhere from five to eight thousand applicants. Nevertheless, the requirements of private and public-school applications are relatively uniform for students.

Private schools predominantly utilize the Common Application whereas state public school systems, e.g. the University of California, have their own system-wide application process. The key components of the public and private college application are SAT or ACT test scores, high school GPA, extracurricular activities, the college essay(s), and depending on the schools, letters of recommendation. Though not all schools require every element listed here, colleges and universities all require some combination of these requirements for review. From afar, these common elements serve as the ingredients for a standardizing review process that allow admissions officers, to the best of their subjective abilities, a way to democratize an evaluative process that should closely be meritocratic. However, closer examination of the particular requirements of the application process reveals an experiential, substantive, quantitative inequality that undermines the tenuous meritocratic balance of these requirements.

Standardized Utility…Academic Futility

The utility of national standardize tests such as the SAT and ACT acting as a cornerstone of admissions decision has always been a controversial issue (Bell, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; Strum & Guinier, 1996). Originally, the SAT never operated as a key evaluative metric for admissions. Rather, Harvard initially used SAT scores to consider merit-based scholarships for its incoming students (Lemann, 1999). From its fledgling inception, standardize tests are now widely used by both private and public institutions as a common measure of evaluation for aspiring college students with divergent educational trajectories. As a consequence of these divergent educational trajectories, standardize test scores have been shown to be the greatest

predictor of educational inequality, (i.e. opportunities, rather than any predictor of academic aptitude or college success). For instance, the greatest correlation of high SAT scores is not with higher education graduation rates or college GPAs, but with the socioeconomic status of the SAT takers" parents (Strum & Guinier, 1996). This should not come as a surprise. With the increasingly high stakes of standardize testing coupled with intermittent substantive changes to the test that require updated strategies and know-how, the private test prep industry has made the SAT and ACT much more accessible for wealthy families. In 2006, private tutoring and test preparation was a $7 billion industry. By 2020, the industry is expected to reach $20 billion in North America alone (Teehan, 2016).

Colleges and Universities are not oblivious of these realities. No school has ever approached admissions by simply admitting a class of students with the highest GPA and standardize test scores. Rather, schools utilize a more holistic approach that includes evaluating extracurricular activities, the college essay, and for some, letters of recommendation. The inclusion of these qualitative measures is, at the very least, an implicit recognition that the unequal educational trajectories of applicants would be further exacerbated if GPA and standardize test scores serve as the only measure of evaluation for admissions. For instance, admissions officers often consider SAT scores within the context of a student's life (Steinberg, 2002). Meaning, parental education level and family affluence matters in providing context when a working-class student's 1090 on the SAT is compared with a middle-class student's 1470 (p. 143-144). Evaluating SAT scores within the context of a student's life suggests that there is a human recalibrating process acknowledging the increasingly polemical nature of "standardize" measures.

A number of selective liberal arts colleges have gone further in addition to considering standardize test scores within the broader context of a student's life. Some colleges such as Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin have selected to go test optional (FairTest, 2017). Test optional schools allow students the option to decide whether or not they wish to submit any standardize test scores with their application. Bates College was the first to institute this practice, making the SAT optional in 1984 and eventually all testing in 1990. After a 20-year time period of test optionality, the College conducted a survey study comparing, among other indicators, the college GPAs of test submitters and non-submitters. The college found any difference to be at best negligible (Hiss et. al., 2014). On graduation rate, the difference was one-tenth of one percent. In theory, test optionality has the potential to altogether eliminate the socioeconomic disparity that is entwined with standardize test performance. However, in practice, the reality of admissions and school rankings severely impinge the democratic promise of test optional.

The annual *US News & World Report's* school rankings are incredibly important for many of these same test optional schools (NACAC, 2011). Although its internal testing policy allows for some movement away from the importance of standardize test scores, external forces limit each school's ability to fully exercise the flexibility of test optionality in admissions. That is, one of the key ranking metrics utilized by *US News* is the cumulative standardize test score average of each years' admissions class (Morse & Flanigan, 2013). If a test optional school like Colby wishes to admit an incoming freshman class entirely comprised of non-submitters, it certainly could. However, not submitting a standardize average to the external ranking is equivalent to submitting a zero average as all metrics are gathered to produce an overall performance score for each school. As a result, test-optional schools must meet a minimum percentage of test submitters to satisfy the *US News"* standardize test score requirement. Because of this, non-submit-

ters have a decided disadvantage to submitters. Test optional schools are unable to truly implement its test optional policy because it must be aware of the *US News* rankings (Gnolek, Falciano, & Kuncl, 2014).

The operative combination of test optionality and external *US News* rankings results in an admissions process at test optional schools that further favors students with attractive standardize test scores. The practice of early decision/early action admissions allows colleges to lock down an initial percentage of its class with high academic credentials because these offers of early admissions are binding. Due to the external testing requirements for rankings, colleges utilizes the early decision processes to stack its class with students who have high scores because a high initial average allows for more flexibility in the regular round of evaluation for students beyond the traditional measurements of excellence (Steinberg, 2002). That is, a higher average in the early decision process allows for more flexibility with lower, or none at all, standardize test scores later on. This is true for all schools with early decision admissions processes, regardless if they are test optional. However, for test optional schools, the importance of admitting students with high standardize test scores in the early decision rounds is even more paramount because it must establish a minimum percentage of submitters to satisfy the *US News* ranking methodology. Furthermore, test optional schools cannot wait for the regular rounds to admit high test scores because they may lose those applicants to early decisions processes at rival institutions. As a consequence, high scoring applicants are often favored in the early decision processes—a preference that is even more pronounced at test-optional schools. The number of schools who have deemphasize the use of standardize test scores is now more than 900 and range from prestigious liberal arts colleges, large public universities, and more accessible regional schools (FairTest, 2017). Nevertheless, as the number of test optional schools has exponentially increased from when Bates College first instituted the policy in 1984, so has the multi-billion-dollar test prep and tutoring industry. These realities guarantee the continuing importance of standardize testing for college admissions—tests that have been shown to be most adept at predicting socioeconomic privilege, as opposed to academic aptitude.

Common Process...Uncommon Access

Standardize test scores are not the only elements of the application process that skew heavily in favor of families and students with wealth and cultural capital. Guidance crafting the personal statement, visits by admissions officers, specific college counselors on staff at the high school, and direct access to college admissions offices are all elements that are often available to well-resourced public and connected private schools (Steinberg, 2002). In the admissions process at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Steinberg documented the admissions team had a direct line of communication with a college counselor at Harvard-Westlake, an exclusive private prep school in Southern California. The relationship was mutually benefiting. For Wesleyan, Harvard-Westlake was a "feeder" school that had consistently provided highly qualified students that contributed to favorable metrics for the *US News* rankings while also providing a degree of desired "diversity" from the west coast. For Harvard-Westlake families who pay a yearly tuition rivaling that of private colleges (Harvard-Westlake, 2017), their students enjoyed incredible access and knowhow regarding the intricacies of the application process. It is not uncommon for former college admissions officers to become counselors at the prep and high school levels—so long as the schools could afford them. This was the case at Wesleyan that Steinberg so powerfully documented.

Wesleyan had a contingent of officers visit Harvard-Westlake, and other "feeder" schools around the country, every late spring to drum up potential interests and applicants. Wesleyan officers would hold workshops on mastering the application process, specifically on important aspects such as constructing an effective college statement. The mutually benefiting relationship did not end there. Once applications began rolling in, a Wesleyan officer and Harvard-Westlake counselor kept in regular contact throughout the process. Wesleyan would be interested in gauging the interest of particular applicants as to whether or not, if accepted, the student would attend. From Harvard-Westlake's perspective, it would advocate for any student in limbo of being accepted or rejected. In an astonishing development, a student from Harvard-Westlake who was already passed over during the decision process was given a reprieve to the waitlist as a result of an aggressive intervention from the Harvard-Westlake counselor. How did this student go from being rejected to the waitlist? Harvard-Westlake's counselor relayed that although the student had a less than stellar application, she was nevertheless a prominent member of the Harvard-Westlake community. As a result, if Wesleyan would reject one of Harvard-Westlake's most prominent students, Wesleyan would not be viewed favorably for subsequent admissions cycle. This concern was brought directly to Wesleyan's director of admissions. Upon further consideration of not wanting to damage Wesleyan's reputation at one of its "feeder" schools, the student's admission candidacy was incredibly revived from the death and moved onto the wait list (Steinberg, 2002, p. 173-199).

Taken together, my two references to the admissions process at Wesleyan are incompatible. On the one hand, at least one admissions officer compellingly, and I argue, correctly, viewed standardize test scores within the context of the students" life. As a result, significant differences in SAT scores are understood more as a reflection of socioeconomics rather than academic aptitude – a rather democratic commitment that reflects the research literature (See Strum & Guinier, 1996). However, specifically traveling to "feeder" schools - not "normal" schools - to establish a desired pool of applicants is the antithesis of a meritocratic commitment. In addition, allowing outside forces to breach the deliberative process made possible by privileged resources poisons a so-called common review process—a rather undemocratic reality. No matter how much consideration college admissions officers give students with sub-optimal standardize test scores, it is hard to fathom any intervention being as consequential as having a high school counselor advocate for a students' candidacy on essentially all stages of the admissions process. At best, the admissions process is quasi meritocratic, and at worst, meritocracy is a myth masquerading behind a tenuous veil of standardization.

Affirmative Action in the Classroom

The nuances of educational inequality that translate to consequential differences in access and opportunities are not socially controversial, but widely accepted. When families purchase a home, one of the primary considerations is the quality of neighboring schools (Brennan, 2011). Many districts have instituted anti-hopping laws to prevent outside students from "stealing" an education (Faw & Jabbar, 2016; Ramirez, 2009)—with some even employing a reward structure for educational "snitches" (Reeves, 2016). In a most revealing example, a mother in Ohio was prosecuted and found guilty of a felony for "stealing" an education for her child (Canning & Tanglao, 2011). The case is revealing not because she offended the district's anti-hopping policy, but that more money was surely spent on prosecuting her than the dollar value of any education she allegedly "stole." As an obvious consequence, the whole ordeal shows that protecting

privileged educational opportunities is priceless. In our classrooms, we would be prudent to utilize and discuss these widely accepted educational realities. In class of nearly fifty students at a public California University, I conducted two exercises with my students during the 2016 Spring Semester. First, my students answered a survey of 10 questions around the topic of affirmative action in California. Here, I present the result of the first three questions from 46 respondents ($n = 46$).

1. Do you think the University of California (UC) uses race as a part of its admissions considerations?
    a. Yes: 86.96%
    b. No: 8.70%
    c. Not Sure: 4.35%
2. Do you think the UC should ever consider race in admissions?
    a. Yes: 23.91%
    b. No: 58.70%
    c. Not Sure: 17.39%
3. Would you support a law that forbids the UC from utilizing race as a part of its admissions criteria?
    a. Yes: 58.70%
    b. No: 17.39%
    c. Not Sure: 23.91%

The responses are rather consistent, especially considering the relationship of questions two and three. However, the decided anti-affirmative action positions evident from all three questions is precluded by actual law in California. That is, in 2016, these questions are completely moot because affirmative action in education and public policy has been completely banned by proposition 209 since 1996 (See Alvarez & Bedolla, 2004). Passed by a comfortable majority, the law has been in effect longer than many of the respondents" age. The ramifications of the survey are multiple and immense. Two issues require immediate attention:

1. Racial antagonism
2. "Badge of inferiority" and cloud of admissions for students of color – but in an anti-affirmative action state!

First, if nearly 90% of the respondents, who are themselves public California students, believe that racial considerations are still used in admissions while nearly 60% think affirmative action should be banned, the antagonism students potentially harbor towards peer minority students could be immense. Furthermore, these racial antagonisms would be based on nothing more than paranoia and stereotyped threat (See Schmader, Hall, & Croft, 2015). Secondly, the dangers of cross-racial animus suggest the absence of a critical understanding of the fast divergence in educational experiences and opportunities (read: inequality) of their fellow peers. That is, stereotyped paranoia presupposes a pseudo meritocratic starting line for all, without much care and consideration for the often grossly disproportionate educational trajectories of students across the wealth and social class spectrum. Therefore, this form of anti-affirmative action racial antagonism is wielded like a double-edged sword. The inequitable educational trajectories of students are conveniently whitewashed from critical examination while, simultaneously, these same

students are held to a pseudo meritocratic standard. These dynamics are a recipe for antagonism, rather than tolerance or empathy.

Second, conservatives and anti-affirmative action advocates often argue that race positive admissions practices can have the unintended consequence of "stigmatizing" students of color as "affirmative action admits," thereby stamping minority students with a "badge of inferiority" (Quinlan, 2015; Leslie et al., 2014). However, the survey results suggest racial stigma exists regardless of whether or not colleges and universities actually use racial considerations. The in-class survey confirms larger campus climate studies that show the persistence of racial stigma and stereotyped threat independent of the use of affirmative action policies. In fact, Bowen (2010) significantly found that college students were more likely to experience racial stigma in states that *barred* racial considerations compared to students at schools with race positive admissions policies. Bowen found three-fourths of students experienced racial stigma in non-affirmative action states compared with less than half in race positive admissions schools. These findings are not insignificant and seriously undermines the suggestion that affirmative action policies stigmatize students of color. In other words, affirmative action may in fact be the solution to racial stigma, rather than its root cause.

However, a follow up exercise to the survey I conducted in class, when analyzed carefully, appeared to undermine the student's strong anti-affirmative action beliefs. Inspired by the deliberative admissions process depicted in *The Gatekeepers* at Wesleyan (Steinberg, 2002), I conducted a mock admissions process for two fictitious students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. At Wesleyan, admissions officers are not prohibited by any state laws restricting awareness of an applicants' racial, ethnic, or gender identity. However, my class exercise was augmented slightly to comply with Proposition 209. Therefore, I constructed two fictitious applicants to the University of California generically identified as student A & B. Students A & B were presented as follows:

	Student A	Student B
GPA (Weighted)	3.6	4.25
SAT (1600)	1150	1450
Extracurricular Activities	Minimal extracurricular activities	Strong list, Well-rounded
Essay Evaluation	Average/competent writer	Compelling/well written

In addition to these characteristics, the students were also asked to consider other extenuating circumstances considered in the University of California admissions process. Although race is prohibited, admissions offices are allowed to consider characteristics such as family income, first generation to attend college, academic performance relative to opportunities available in school, and location of secondary school and residence (University of California Admissions, 2014). Therefore, students were asked to make a case for admissions for student A & B with the following considerations:

	Student A	Student B
Education & Family Background	First Generation College Student, Low Family Income	College Educated Parents, Middle Class Economic Status
High School: Location & Characteristic	Oakland, Public Inner City	Private, Los Angeles County

In the affirmative action debate, antagonistic hypotheticals between deserving and undeserving students are often pitted against each other. That is, two students, one usually clearly more qualified but for race, fighting for one spot. However, that is not reflective of the admissions process. Admissions officers are rarely, if ever, asked to select between two students. Students are evaluated independently from each other, and borderline applicants are voted on one at a time in committee (Steinberg, 2002, pg. 125). At Wesleyan, a borderline candidate required 5 affirmative votes out of 9 to be admitted. I wanted to replicate the actual process of admissions and avoid the false hypothetical of applicants being pitted against one another. I divided my class into five groups of 10 and asked not which applicant "deserved" a fictitious singular spot, but rather if each group could make a compelling case to admit either applicant.

The results were revealing. Not surprisingly, none of the groups had any problems with admitting student B. But surprisingly, no group had difficulty making an affirmative admissions case for student A. In arguing for student A, groups collectively shared various justifications that student A's background and educational opportunities were important in contextualizing a lower GPA, extracurricular activities, and SAT score—a rather democratic disposition not unlike those practiced in the admissions office at Wesleyan. More importantly, students were affirmatively accounting for significant differences in educational trajectories, while not knowing the race, ethnicity, or gender of either applicant. Therefore, it effectively would matter little in the end when each group knew that applicant A was a minority and applicant B was white because a case for admissions for both was already made *sans* any explicit racial knowledge. This is because even for a class that is decidedly anti-affirmative action in theory, they are not anti-affirmative action *per se* in practice. Even more striking, I conducted the survey and mock admissions exercise on the same day.

The survey results and hypothetical classroom exercise exemplify the necessity for grounding discussions of equal opportunity and meritocracy on everyday material conditions and considerations of social class. This was the emphasis of Fishkin (2013) and Howe (2015) as both authors argued against engagements of meritocratic concepts absent structural analysis divorced of social circumstances. In pairing the survey and hypothetical admissions exercise, my students were able to witness firsthand that collective antagonistic anti-affirmative action ideologies are often severed from knowledge of our own educational ecology—one that is often defined by issues of inequality, access, and racism. The exercise is perhaps more indelible when students are leading their own discovery process as defined by their survey responses, admissions deliberative discussions, and reconciling the seemingly divergent results between survey and mock admissions exercise. Affirmative action discussions always invoke ideas of equal opportunity and meritocratic concepts. The phrase "affirmative action" has itself become a perilous ideological flashpoint fraught with racial antagonism and stereotyped paranoia. A compelling response is to engage in affirmative action talk not from perceived ideological differences, but through our shared educational experiences, thereby ushering in the possibility for a more fulfilled educational justice and meritocracy.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that an often ignored but consequential element of the affirmative action debate is the false imposition and acceptance of meritocracy. By investigating selected components of the admissions process—though not nearly all—I have shown that those with

economic resources and cultural capital can significantly tilt an alleged meritocratic process in their favor. It is not my intention to argue that the exercise of economic and cultural capital is inherently wrong within the application process. This is a discussion that I am neither interested in nor harbor any illusions that these dynamics will ever change. However, the larger significance is that when colleges and universities exercise affirmative action, the policy is but a modest attempt to tilt the scale of access and opportunity that already overwhelmingly favors the privileged. Finally, I share my classroom research to illustrate the stark divergence between ideological belief juxtaposed with the lived and learned educational realities of students when it comes to affirmative action, meritocracy, and opportunities of educational access.

In the fledgling post-Fisher discourse on race and college admissions, our classrooms should utilize this contemporaneous moment to have a thoughtful and prudent conversation on the continuing significance of race and inequality in education. It is my hope that in our classrooms, we can have constructive discussions on meritocracy and affirmative action based not on our racial paranoias and stereotyped threats, but on our shared educational experiences, even if they are starkly unequal. To do so is neither controversial nor provocative, but rather an act of intellectual honestly that attempts to demystify how race continues to be misrecognized in our so-called colorblind, post-race society.

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A Focus on Civility with Public School Educators and Students

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Abstract

Public school teachers in Southwest Texas were surveyed regarding important civil behaviors students should practice and prevalent uncivil behaviors they have observed in the classroom. There was consensus across all demographic groups that the most important civil behaviors were the ability to successfully manage conflicts with others and the ability to respond respectfully to the opinions of others. The most prevalent uncivil behavior reported by the teachers was the use of sarcastic remarks to others followed by blaming others for their own negative actions. Focus groups with high school students were held on the same topic. Findings demonstrated similarities and differences between teachers and students and their perceptions of civility.

Keywords**:** *Teacher motivation, teacher development, distance education, teacher leadership, teacher education*

Statement of Purpose

Our public-school system has the potential to nurture the attitudes, values, and behaviors that promote a democratic and civil society. Schroeder observed that "Americans have long viewed public schools as the primary site of moral and cultural development" (Schroeder, 2017). Today, there are many evidences of the need for civility. In a 2013 survey, 98% of employees surveyed reported that they have experienced uncivil behavior in the workplace (Porath & Pearson, 2015). Classroom teacher Justin Parmenter also noted the decline in civility as evidenced by student behaviors in public schools today (Parmeter, 2018). Political commentators, too, lament the lack of civility in our public discourse today (Levine, 2010). On all fronts in our society, the need for greater civility is demonstrated.

Literature Review

History

Civility has been a common theme throughout our history. Our Founding Father George Washington at age 16 penned 110 rules for civil behavior. Washington's rules included: "Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those present." and "Speak not injurious words, neither in jest or earnest; scoff at none although they give occasion." (Washington, 1744, 2008, p. 9).

Two centuries later, John Dewey addressed the importance of civil behaviors in our society. He argued that civility is more than ordinary morality. Rather, Dewey maintained that the

key to civility is to engage one's personal interest and reflection; thereby developing an "inner morality" (Dewey, 1916, 2009). Megan Laverty (2009) more recently explored the philosophical underpinnings of civility in her article, *Civility, Tact, and the Joy of Communication*. She posited that civility has aesthetic-ethical significance. Civility, she suggested, is not simply social niceties, but a profound set of behaviors that facilitates meaningful human interaction and exchange (Laverty, 2009).

Definition

Many researchers have defined civility. Moore (2012) defined civility as the knowledge, attitudes, values, habits, and behaviors that are central to maintaining a healthy, diverse and dynamic society. He also suggested that civility is predicated on the belief that all human beings are of equal moral worth (Moore, 2012).

The National Council for Social Studies also addressed civility in the organization's National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Under the Civic Ideals and Practices theme, the NCSS called for an "understanding that civic ideals and practices are critical to full participation in society and that understanding is an essential component of education for citizenship, which is the central purpose of social studies" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017, para. 10). Wilkins, Caldarella, Crook-Lyon, and Young (2010) referenced the Latin roots of the word, civics (citizen) and civitas (city) to demonstrate the relationship of civility and society. In their study, they defined civility as "behaviors that show respect toward a person in order to maintain social harmony or recognize the humanity of that person" (Wilkins et al., 2010, p.543).

Leskes added that civil discourse should be characterized by exchanges that are robust, honest, frank, and constructive (Leskes, 2013). Borba (2018) maintained that civility is encompassed in social and emotional learning, and she suggested that empathy may be a synonym for civility.

Need for Civility

Many researchers report the need for civility. On the political front, Moore (2012) highlighted President Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address as an example of the importance of civility, "So let us begin anew—remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems that divide us." (p. 147). Levine (2010) cited President Clinton's 1997 inaugural address when he called for "the politics of reconciliation" as recognition of the centrality of civility (p. 147). Levine (2010) called for more studies on the processes and conditions that promote civility.

Leskes (2013) acknowledged that "democracy is messy," and controversial issues have always generated strong feelings. Leskes challenged the academy to commit itself strenuously and immediately to improving civil discourse as a tool for democracy.

Constraints to Promoting Civility

John Dewey (1916/2009), in *Democracy and Education*: *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, warned against civility as simply conforming the individual to engage in activities which are socially serviceable, if that service is not understood nor personally valued by the individual. He distinguished between an "inner morality" and "ordinary morality" where inner is

driven by motive and character, and ordinary is motivated by conduct and consequences (Dewey, 1916/2009). In the classroom, there is often a compromise between the two. Dewey stressed, however, that the ultimate goal is to create a learning environment for students where "actions may be governed by the student's own interest and where neither routine habit nor the following of dictated directions nor capricious improvising will suffice." Instead, acts of civility should be characterized by the "rise of conscious purpose, conscious desire, and deliberate reflection" (Dewey, 1916/2009, p. 350). He criticized the overemphasis on conventions and traditions to dictate students' actions. He advised to avoid a narrow definition of civil behaviors that he termed to be "sentimental goody-goody" (Dewey, 1916/2009, p. 350). Moore (2012) also was concerned about how civility was approached in the classroom. He stressed that there must be a balance between the two moralities.

Summary

A review of the literature demonstrates that civility is considered to be an essential component of a democratic society. The challenge is to define those civil behaviors and explore how they can be modeled, rather than inculcated, to help students develop their own sense of "inner morality".

Purposes of this Study

The review of the literature demonstrates the significance of civility, but also reflects the myriad of definitions. Research is needed on how civility is perceived in our public schools and how that definition is actualized. Civil behaviors have tremendous impact on students and ultimately on our society. This study is shaped along the research conducted by Wilkins et al. (2010) and uses the same definition of civility, "behaviors that show respect toward a person in order to maintain social harmony or recognize the humanity of that person" (p. 594). However, this study investigates three different questions via a survey and focus groups:

1. What do educators believe are important descriptors of civil behavior for school age students?
2. What do educators perceive are the most prevalent uncivil behaviors of school age students?
3. What behaviors do secondary school students value as important or detrimental to a civil environment in public school?

Methodology

Mixed methodology was utilized for this study (CITE). It was anticipated that a mixed methods approach will provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the topic of civility. The quantitative method featured a questionnaire consisting of ten items describing civil behavior and ten items describing uncivil behavior. The list of descriptors for the quantitative survey draws from suggestions in the literature describing what constitutes civil and uncivil behavior (Benton, 2007, Burns, 2003, Feldman, 2001; Forni, 2002; Plank, McDill, McPartland, & Jordan, 2001; Wilkins et.al., 2010). Participants were asked to rank the importance of the civil behaviors and the prevalence of the uncivil behaviors. A Likert Scale was used for respondents. The items from the survey are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

Randomly selected high school students took the quantitative survey, too, and then participated in focus groups. Comments from the student focus groups were coded independently by the primary researcher and assistant to ensure inter-rater agreement. Seven distinct themes emerged from the responses; with many of the students' responses addressing several themes. The coded themes are listed in Tables 3 and 4.

Participants for the Quantitative Study—Survey

Educators in school districts in Southwest Texas near Sul Ross State University were contacted by email to participate. Graduate students in the Education Department at Sul Ross State University also were invited to participate. A Qualtrics survey link was emailed to 276 educators in August 2018, and 114 anonymous responses were received with a return rate of 41.3%. From a geographical perspective, 59% of the respondents were from rural areas, 15% were from suburban areas, and 26% were from urban areas. The ethnic distribution was 50% white, 46% Hispanic, and 4% other. Seventy-two percent (72%) were female, and twenty-eight percent (28%) were male. Most of the respondents were currently working in schools (76%) and referred to as contracted teachers; while 24% reported they were pre-service teachers.

Participants for the Qualitative Study—Focus Groups

Twenty high school students from a small, rural school district in Southwest Texas were randomly selected to participate by the school principal. Twelve students returned the Consent Forms to participate. Those who did not return their Consent Forms may have forgotten, were not interested, and/or did not want to miss class. The twelve students were divided into two focus groups that were held on April 17, 2019. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the students were female, and fifty-two percent (52%) were male.

Data Analysis

Teachers' survey results demonstrated their favored behaviors in the classroom. Ten civil behaviors were rated, and the scores are reported in Table 1.

Reported Teachers' Priority Ratings for Civil Behaviors

Table 1

Participants' Priority Ratings for Civil Behaviors

Civil Behavior	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not at all Important
Aware of needs of others	39%	45%	15%	.9%	0%
Respond appropriately to needs of others	47%	42%	9%	2%	0%
Demonstrates skills to successfully manage conflict with others	61%	35%	4%	.9%	0%

Dress and groom themselves in ways appropriate for school	28%	42%	25%	.9%	0%
Sincerely compliments others	30%	45%	23%	2%	.9%
Use polite expressions and greetings with others	41%	50%	7%	.9%	.9%
Responsive to situations in which they may help others	46%	42%	11%	2%	0%
Respond respectfully to opinions of others	57%	39%	4%	.9%	0%
Consider how their behavior may affect others	54%	40%	4%	.9%	.9%
Include others in their activities	38%	39%	21%	2%	0%

For analysis purposes, the ratings of "extremely important" and "very important" have been combined. Overall, among the civil behaviors, the descriptor, "Ability to demonstrate skills to successfully manage conflict*,"* was rated one of the highest as "extremely important" or "very important." Ninety-seven percent (97%) of all male educators rated that descriptor the highest, and 95% of all female educators concurred. For pre-service teachers, their rating for that item was 100%. Respondents who were contracted teachers rated the descriptor at 94%. The overall rating for this top descriptor was 96%.

The descriptor, "Respond respectfully to the opinions of others" also received an overall rating of 96%. Elementary and secondary teachers selected the descriptor; "Respond respectfully to the opinions of others," to be the highest priority ("extremely important" or "very important"). One hundred percent (100%) of elementary teachers, and 93% of secondary teachers rated the descriptor "extremely important" to "very important." Respondents from rural areas rated "Respond respectfully to the opinions of others" at 92%; while respondents from both suburban and urban areas rated the descriptor at 100%.

Reported Teachers' Perceptions of Prevalent Uncivil Behavior

Next, teachers were surveyed on their perceptions of uncivil student behaviors. They rated ten uncivil behaviors. Table 2 lists the uncivil behaviors with teachers' rating.

Table 2

Participants' Prevalence Ratings of Uncivil Behavior

Uncivil Behavior	**Very Prevalent**	**Prevalent**	**Slightly Prevalent**	**Not Prevalent**	**Not at all Prevalent**
Argue or quarrel with others	10%	33%	42%	14%	2%
Call others offensive names	12%	29%	36%	15%	7%

Blame others for their own negative actions	14%	37%	30%	14%	4%
Litter hallways, class-rooms or school grounds	9%	19%	33%	29%	11%
Complain about school grievances (i.e. grades, schedules, tests, etc.)	20%	27%	31%	17%	5%
Make sarcastic remarks to others	16%	37%	30%	10%	7%
Use offensive language on school grounds	17%	28%	31%	12%	12%
Inconsiderate of others in their use of classroom supplies	10%	17%	42%	26%	5%
Exclude others from their activities	9%	29%	40%	16%	6%
Respond inappropriately when they do not get what they want	11%	36%	34%	15%	6%

For analysis purposes, the ratings of "very prevalent" and "prevalent" were combined. Males rated the descriptor, "Make sarcastic remarks to others," and the most prevalent at 60% ("very prevalent" or "prevalent"). Females selected the same descriptor as most prevalent at 51%. The overall rating was 53%.

The second most prevalent uncivil behavior reported by educators was "Blame others for their own negative actions." Respondents rated the prevalence of that uncivil behavior at 51% ("very prevalent" and "prevalent"). Males rated the prevalence at 57%; while females rated the prevalence at 50%.

Discussion

Data collected suggested that uncivil behaviors are not highly prevalent in the schools where the participants work or observe. No rating of very prevalent or highly prevalent was greater than 60%. There is a high level of agreement among teachers on what constitutes civil behavior, with the "Ability to successfully manage conflict" rated 96% overall, and "Respond respectfully to the opinions of others" rated 96% overall, too. There also is a high level of agreement among teachers on what are the most prevalent uncivil behaviors with "Making sarcastic remarks to others" top (53%) and followed by "Blame others for their own negative actions" (51%).

Reported Students' Perceptions of Civility in Focus Groups

Before the focus group discussions began, each student took the same survey on civil and uncivil behaviors as the teachers did. They also were asked to rate the level of civility at their school. Using a rating of five for ideal to three for worst, 33% of all students rated the level of civility at a two; while 67% rated the level of civility at a three or higher.

The researcher then conducted the focus groups. Table 3 addresses the question, Is incivility a problem at your school? If so, how should it be addressed? There were nine responses from

Focus Group One and six responses from Focus Group Two. The varied student responses were evaluated for commonalities. The primary researcher and assistant identified seven themes and concurred that many participants' responses were labeled under two or more of those themes. The seven themes in response to incivility, based on students' responses, included:

1) Positivity is best to promote civility;
2) Simply ignore incivility;
3) Importance of respect;
4) Personal accountability;
5) Negativity promotes incivility;
6) Dangers of incivility;
7) Need involvement from others

Table 3

Coded Themes of Responses to Question:
How Should Incivility Be Addressed at Your School?

Theme	**Focus Group One N**	**Focus Group One %**	**Focus Group Two N**	**Focus Group Two %**
Positivity promotes civility	5	29.4%	1	8.3%
Simply ignore incivility	4	23.5%	2	16.7%
Importance of respect	2	11.8%	1	8.3%
Personal accountability	2	11.8%	3	25%
Negativity promotes incivility	2	11.8%	1	8.3%
Dangers of incivility	1	5.9%	2	16.7%
Need involvement from others	1	5.9%	2	16.7%

Focus Group One student responses placed more emphasis on positivity (29%) than students in Focus Group Two (8.3%). Students in both groups recognized the option of simply ignoring uncivil behavior (23.5% for Focus Group One and 16.7% for Focus Group Two). One student stated, "Everyone's reaction is based on how you perceive things. Don't take everything to heart." Students in Focus Group Two voiced a greater sense of personal accountability for the level of civility at their school (25% for Focus Group Two and 11.8% for Focus Group One).

Table 4 addresses the question, How important is civility? There were six responses from Focus Group One and six responses from Focus Group Two.

Table 4

Responses to Question: How important is civility?

Focus Group	**Focus Group One N**	**Focus Group One %**	**Focus Group Two N**	**Focus Group Two %**
Very Important	1	16.7%	0	0.0%
Important	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Somewhat important	3	50%	4	66.7%
Little Importance	2	33.3%	2	33.3%
No Importance	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

All students agreed that civility was important for their school. However, Focus Group One rated the importance of civility higher. Concern was expressed in both focus groups about the potential dangers of incivility, and several students referenced school shootings across the country. During the discussions in both Focus Groups One and Two, the theme of need for involvement from others was voiced nine times. Students felt that in the school setting, they needed the intervention of teachers and administrators to address some issues of civility.

Limitations and Future Research

The study participants (both teachers and students) were all from the Southwest Texas area. Furthermore, the respondents were primarily from rural areas in Texas (59%). It is unclear if these findings would be similar across the United States. Although the survey items were literature-based, the reliability and validity of the instrument have not been determined. Participants rated the uncivil and civil descriptors, but they may or may not have defined them in the same way. A larger number of students in the focus groups and teachers in the survey may results in different findings.

Finally, this study does not address the concerns that were raised in the literature about the approach for nurturing civil behaviors, as presented by Dewey. A qualitative research study may explore Dewey's questions.

Conclusions

It is evident that the importance of civility has a long history in our country. Since schools are perceived as one common experience that all people share, our schools are logical places to nurture civil behaviors. There is a remarkably strong consensus among the educators polled on what are the most important civil behaviors and what are the most prevalent uncivil behaviors.

The most important civil behaviors identified were "Ability to demonstrate skills to successfully manage conflict with others" and "Respond respectfully to the opinions of others." The most prevalent uncivil behavior reported was "Make sarcastic remarks to others" followed by "Blame others for their own negative actions." The common concern among 21st century educators regarding the use of sarcasm and George Washington's caution against the use of "injurious words" almost three-hundred years ago is remarkable.

A comparison of survey ratings by teachers and students showed some similarities and differences. Students placed greater importance on the need to "Consider how one's behavior may affect others"; while teachers rated the "Ability to demonstrate skills to manage conflict successfully with others" as more important. Students overwhelmingly stated that "Blaming others for their own negative actions" was most prevalent; while teachers selected both "Making sarcastic remarks to others" and "Blaming others for their own negative actions" as the most prevalent uncivil behaviors.

There are some reoccurring themes that appeared in the student responses: ignoring incivility and need involvement from others. Students reported that they cope with incivility by ignoring it, and they also commented that their teachers do sometimes, as well. Students expressed many times the wish that teachers and administrators would be more involved in addressing the topic of civility. One student commented, "Teachers should be more concerned about student civility and not just worried about what they have to teach and what we have to learn." Another student cautioned that "We must be careful when we speak to others. Without civility, it will make students want to hurt themselves and others." Another student concluded, "It is helpful to have a bond with a teacher and know they care and really want to help the student succeed in school and life outside after graduation."

There are many perspectives on civility, but we all agree that civility is vital for a healthy democracy and society. This study confirms that we cannot just ignore incivility. The student focus groups demonstrate that students need more adult support and involvement in shaping a civil and productive learning environment. One student put it very succinctly, "Kids do not want to be at a school that is always negative." More dialogue is needed among students and educators to design meaningful opportunities for civil human interactions and exchanges in our schools and ultimately in our society.

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What Exactly Are We Doing Here? Reflections on the Role of Critical Educational Studies

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Abstract

In advancing the struggle for social justice in education, we often advance an anti-racist praxis in our classrooms. However, students, teachers, and others trying to make sense of our praxis—oftentimes well-intentioned in their queries—will ask "why are we always talking about race?" and "why do we only present one perspective and one position (a "liberal" one) in this class?" These questions are relevant and require us to clarify what exactly are we doing in critical educational studies? As a former K-12 teacher, an instructor of Urban Education, Multicultural Education, and as a critical educational researcher, I seek to ask—and answer—three questions pertinent to critical educational studies: (1) What does it mean to study Urban Education? (2) Why do we focus on race and racism in social justice work, and why not just focus on class? (3) Why do some people attempt to equate critical educational studies with left-wing propaganda? I begin by examining the difference between education and pedagogy in order to advance a definition of critical educational studies, and then advance claims to answer the aforementioned questions. I close the piece by providing three points of consideration in our educational praxis as well as concluding reflections around responsibility, education, and our trajectory for the future.

Keywords: *urban education, multicultural education, critical educational studies, anti-racist education*

Introduction

As a former elementary, middle, and high school teacher as well as instructor of Multicultural Education and Urban Education courses in teacher preparation programs, I have found that there is sometimes a lack of clarity around what critical educational studies entails. By *critical educational studies*, I mean a study of both *education*[1] and *pedagogy*, of both instructional strategies as well as an orientation to the world that allow us to make informed choices in teaching and learning that work towards a humanizing future.

My aim here is to provide a point of introduction to critical educational studies that tackles from the start the questions that require us to define and clarify our educational praxis. This work is intended for different, but related audiences: aspiring educators in teacher preparation programs,

1. "Education" is much broader than schooling, but in this work, I utilize it as synonymous with schooling as is implied when we discuss multicultural education and urban education. That is to say, a more accurate title for the courses would be *Multicultural Schooling* and *Urban Schooling.*

in-service teachers looking to delve into deeper reflection about what it means to teach, and even doctoral students and other scholars searching for a better understanding of social justice efforts in education. Additionally, this work may be of interest to instructors of social justice and equity-based courses that seek to establish a common language and vision for the work in their courses. I hope this article can serve as an introductory course text or as an object of reflection among those thinking about critical educational studies. Specifically, I examine three questions: (1) What does it mean to study Urban Education? (2) Why do we focus on race and racism in social justice work, and why not just focus on class? (3) Why do some people attempt to equate critical educational studies with left-wing propaganda?

I answer each of the following questions in their own section below. As a stylistic note, I make the decision to place references to texts in footnotes so that it may read more like a conversation than a treatise of the topic. It is possible that each individual section of this article can be read on its own, though the three sections are related and paint a broader picture that I advance as important to our work in critical educational studies. In the conclusion, I provide a brief reflection on this work as well as three activities that facilitators can use when working in teacher preparation courses, professional development with in-service teachers, or as educators who engage these themes among themselves.

Why Urban? Why Education? Why Urban Education?

In teacher education, there are courses designed to specifically explore concerns with educational equity. Two common course offerings are *Multicultural Education* and *Urban Education*. In some cases, they are synonymous with one another and are just a matter of whether a department wants to call the course "multicultural" or "urban." In other cases, departments offer both a multicultural education and an urban education course with some nuanced differences. There are other scholars that have unpacked what the term "multicultural" means when we think about multicultural education.[2] Here, I will focus on what we mean by "urban," but also by what we mean when we say "education," and also by "urban education."

Urban is a term that we readily deploy in order to describe spaces and people within spaces, but when pressed to provide a definition of what urban means, some of us struggle. There are others that have provided a definition of the term that might be helpful.[3] Here, I explain how I have interpreted the use of the term "urban" in the field of education.

I have briefly explored my concern with the term elsewhere,[4] but urban can serve to describe a space such as New York City with its massive skyscrapers and 8.5 million people to a small town with less than 20,000 people. How can this be so? When we use the term *urban* in relation to schools, it often serves as a loose term to define diverse spaces in which we find mostly non-White, low-income people of color. Additionally, urban often has connotations of challenges that low-income schools with mostly students of color may face such as increased criminalization of disciplinary infractions, underperformance on standardized tests, and large numbers of English Language Learners, to name a few. Though there are scholars that have addressed concerns around

2. Jason Irizarry, "Reinvigorating multicultural education through youth participatory action research," *Multicultural Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (2009): 194-99. See also Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 2-18.

3. Richard Milner IV, "But what is Urban Education?" *Urban Education* 47, no. 3 (2009): 556-61. See also Ericka J. Fisher, *Educating the Urban Race*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

4. See Josué R. López, and Jason Irizarry, "Somos pero no somos iguales/We Are but We Are Not the Same: Unpacking Latinx Indigeneity and the Implications for Urban Schools," *Urban Education* (2019): 1-26.

the school-to-prison pipeline,[5] the opportunity gap and the educational debt in terms of disparities in standardized testing,[6] and the concerns with deficit-based approaches to labeling and mis-educating bilingual and multilingual students,[7] these attributes continue to be pervasive in urban schools. An important point to underscore here is that the label of *urban* often has a racialized dimension, and I take up the concern with race in more depth in the following section.

Someone may point out that though the field of education often uses the term "urban" to describe a group of people—particularly low-income people of color—rather than the actual geographic location, this does not necessarily mean that we must do the same. In other words, we could redefine the way the term "urban" should be used, or at the very least use it more accurately. This would be helpful for a number of reasons: it would allow us to more adequately understand the relation between different geographic spaces such as urban, suburban, and rural; it would allow us to understand that race and racism are significant across these different geographical contexts; and it would allow us to more effectively examine the role of racism in schools located within these geographic spaces. These are important points for us to keep in mind. Indeed, it may be more helpful to move away from naming courses "Urban Education" and instead moving toward a name that more accurately captures our goals of examining racialized schooling practices in different geographical locations such as "Space, Place Race, and Education."

How might we then understand the term education? In order to provide a definition, I distinguish between education and pedagogy. There are others that have provided their own conception of what these terms mean with direct and indirect definitions. Here, I also provide my own interpretations of these terms. I narrowly define education in the context of formal schooling as the instructional decisions that we usually associate with a "toolkit." This involves valuable teacher skills such as lesson planning, helpful questions in checking for comprehension, incorporating manipulatives into the lesson, supporting students in developing word-attack skills to decode (read aloud) difficult words as well as understand the meaning of words in the context of a sentence or paragraph, numerous strategies to support students behind grade level, and approaches for working with students whose native language is not English. It is important to acknowledge that education as historically occurred beyond the classroom, as notable educational historians have indicated.[8] Indeed, it continues to be so today. We may consider how we learn from our families, friends, those in our communities, media, etc. Due to the scope of this essay, though, I limit my analysis of the term "education" to its role in the classroom. In other words, I use education as synonymous with schooling throughout this work.

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5. Torin Monahan, "The Surveillance Curriculum: Risk Management and Social Control in the Neoliberal School," in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader,* ed. Antonia Darder et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 123-134. See also Nancy A. Heitzeg, "Education or Incarceration: Zero Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline." in *Forum onPpublic Policy Online* (2009): 1-21. Moreover, see Brenda Guadalupe Valles and Octavio Villalpando, "A Critical Race Policy Analysis of the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Chicanos," in *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education,* eds. Marvin Lynn and Adrienne Dixson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 260-69.

6. Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools," *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 7 (2006): 3-12. See also Richard Milner IV."Beyond a test score: Explaining opportunity gaps in educational practice," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (2012): 693-718.

7. Ofelia García, "Emergent Bilinguals and TESOL: What's in a Name?" in *Tesol Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2009): 322-326. See also Ofelia García, Susan Ibarra Johnson, and Kate Seltzer, *The Translanguaging Classroom* (Philadelphia: Caslon, 2017).

8. Consider, for instance, Lawrence Cremin's rich work on the history of education in the United States. Consider his definition of education as going "beyond the schools to a host of other institutions that educate: families, churches, libraries, museums, publishers, benevolent societies, youth groups, agricultural fairs, radio networks, military organizations, and research institutes." See *American Education: The National Experience 1783-1876.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970): xi.

I provide this limited definition of *education* in order to address a common concern found by many instructors of courses in critical education studies, such as Multicultural Education and Urban Education. There are some pre-service teachers that believe the role of their teacher preparation program is to solely provide them this toolkit so that they know what to do and when to do it when they are hired to teach. When discussions regarding anti-racism, feminism, open-border movements, sexual and gender equity, and other social justice matters are presented as part of learning, pre-service teachers may react by saying "This has nothing to do with me or with teaching. I just want to know how to best teach my student and get them to college." This reaction is not limited to pre-service teachers, but also includes many in-service teachers attempting to do what they can to best support their students in the classroom.

Though the preoccupation with what to do once students are in front of us as teachers is absolutely important, the focus on acquisition of instructional strategies to deal with the immediate concerns can narrow the scope of learning. Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire[9] would refer to the concern with developing a teacher toolkit as the mechanization of education. His warning was that we should not move the act of teaching to a mechanical one where we think a teacher provides a particular input, a student provides a specific output, and so and so forth. Freire insists on us recognizing that the act of teaching and learning is not one of automatons but of human beings. Throughout his works, Freire insisted upon educators understanding that part of being human is that we are constantly in a process of becoming, or of growing. This aspect is what makes studying education a critical activity, and what I put forth as critical educational studies, or both education and pedagogy. Let us now define pedagogy.

I define pedagogy as an orientation to the world and others within it which informs all our decisions as educators. This certainly includes which instructional strategies we choose but also other aspects of teaching and learning such as text selection, assignments/academic expectations, discipline/forms of redirecting student behavior, building student-teacher relationships, facilitating student-student relationships, fostering family and community relations, and connecting learning to movements for social justice. Part of the difference between education and pedagogy is that it is possible that education could be an activity that is completed while pedagogical development is infinite since it is tied to our ability to grow as human beings. For example, a pre-service teacher specializing in English could demonstrate on an exam that she knows thirty different strategies of how to support reading comprehension for bilingual and multilingual students when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird.* She has prepared her teacher toolkit for this task. However, her development as a pedagogue could always be extended. What is her knowledge of the historical period in which the novel was set and in which Harper Lee wrote the novel? This would require, at a minimum, extensive study in the history of race and racism. How does *To Kill a Mockingbird* make sense in the reality of her students? This would require, at a minimum, numerous conversations to get to know her students, their families, and their community. Why is Harper Lee's story valuable to our efforts for racial justice in the present? This would require, at a minimum, not only a complex examination of the past and present, but also deep reflection—alone and with others—to think about the trajectory for the future of our society. This is certainly more work than can be done in a 45-minute prep period on a Wednesday afternoon. Indeed, it is more than enough work for a lifetime.

The connection between pedagogy and education is an intimate one: we can make better decisions for our students if we constantly seek to extend our learning (our orientation to the world

9. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

and others within it), including the selection of stronger instructional strategies. Rather than distinguishing between the two, I use the term critical educational studies to refer to both as one. Furthermore, it is important to note that the implications of constantly having to re-orient oneself to the world and others can appear daunting to some at first. It is an awesome responsibility. There are two points to make briefly here. First, let us recall Freire's position on the human condition as one of constantly becoming. Humans are always growing, and what critical educational studies do is remind us of the fact that we are humans and that teaching is a human act. In other words, we as educators are constantly growing and we are constantly facilitating growth in our students. No one is expected to be perfect or complete. What we can expect from ourselves, though, is a disposition that allows us to learn as much and as often as we can to best serve our students. We would desire the same disposition from our students, so it seems that we as teachers should embody the same expectations. Secondly, the responsibility of re-orienting and growing can make educators hesitate and potentially slide into despair. This might appear in the form of paralysis from fear of making a mistake or disserving our students. Again, we can refer to the first point above around human growth and (im)perfection. We can also imagine that we might want our students to make the best choice possible under difficult conditions and to be able to learn from their mistakes. If we expect our students to learn and grow moving forward, again we should embody these expectations as well.

Let us finally place both Urban and Education together. What is it that we mean when we study Urban Education? My proposition here is that we do not study education as I have defined it above, but instead it is both education and pedagogy, or critical educational studies. We might ask "critical of what?" My answer is: of urban, what it means, and what it is meant to imply. In other words, the term "urban" does not accurately depict the relationship between space, race, and its subsequent impact on education. As noted earlier, I recognize that "Urban Education" is not actually an appropriate name for work around spatial and racial justice in education. However, given that there are "Urban Education" courses across colleges and universities, I will use the term as such and encourage us to be conscious of its limitations.

As stated earlier, urban has, among other things, a racialized dimension to it. It then follows that race and racism will be central in Urban Education. Our work as educators will involve both the development of instructional strategies as well as re-orienting ourselves to the world and others in it so that we may advance anti-racist education.

Why race? Why not just class?

I divide this section into three parts. The first provides working definitions of terms important to the section and the article more broadly. The second examines the relationship between race and class. The third proposes that an anti-racist struggle involves an element that a class-based struggle does not necessarily address.

Race, Racism, and Racialization

It seems important to provide some working definitions of race, racialization, and racism so that we may work with a common understanding of what I mean when I use these terms throughout the section. The definitions I provide are limited and require further unpacking, particularly as we begin to think about how race, racialization, and racism came to be and continue to function in our lives. There are a number of authors that provide a more comprehensive analysis of these terms

in their own writings,[10] but I provide the following as workable definitions that allow us to think together through a common language.

Race is a manner of dividing and grouping people, typically by physiological characteristics—most notably skin color in the United States. Race is a social construct, meaning that it is an invention by human beings used to divide and, ultimately, to dominate others since race does not serve to explain any inherent biological or cultural differences in abilities. However, we cannot dismiss the significance of race because of its very concrete impact on the lived experiences of people of color. In other words, there is a clear power imbalance in US society informed by race. An example: though we know race is a social construct, disproportionate police violence and rates of incarceration against communities of color, particularly Black communities, highlights the relevance of race (and racism) today. In other words, we can recognize intellectually that race is an invented concept, but in reality it has significant implications for how people are treated by others (in our example, by police officers) and by institutions (in our example, by the criminal justice system). If we consider educational examples, US history has demonstrated a consistent violence in the mis-education of communities of color, such as the experience of Indigenous peoples and their cultural and linguistic erasures through boarding schools.[11] We may also consider the civil rights struggle that involved *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), effectively challenging segregation laws and separate but equal. We must also acknowledge that while *de jure* (legal) segregation was ended, there is still *de facto* (by fact) segregation, as is evident by the preponderance of schools with a majority or entirely student body of color, or schools with a majority or entirely white student body. This is important to consider in the relationship between race and space central to educational equity.

Racialization refers to the association of a variety of cultural and ethnic markers to particular races. Such markers include but are not limited to language, nationality, clothing, music, customs, and manners. Examples abound: A Spanish-speaker is associated with the Latino race;[12] rhythm is perceived to be something Black communities possess in abundance to other racial groups;[13] reading books and even speaking in university-approved English—such as the style of this article—is seen as a White activity, and people of color can be accused of "acting White" for engaging in these activities.

Racism is the differentiated treatment of certain races for the advantage of the dominant race and the disadvantage of other races. There are numerous examples of racism but let us take a look at one in the context of schooling: school funding. Schools are funded primarily through local property tax. In the United States, it is also a fact that wealthier communities are predominantly

10. For example, Jean Paul Sartre provides an examination of anti-Semitic behavior in *Anti-Semite and Jew.* (New York: Grove Press, 1962); Michael Monahan explores the philosophical, political, and social underpinnings of racism in *The Creolizing Subject: Race, Reason and the Politics of Purity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), and Lewis Gordon examines the existential situation and (ir)responsibility that fuels racism in *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* (New York: Prometheus, 1995).

11. See Sandy Grande's *Red Pedagogy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) for a more detailed analysis of Indigeneity and education, as well as her critique of critical pedagogy influenced by Marxist class analysis.

12. Much attention has been paid to both the invention of Latin America and the Latin American identity. See, for example, Walter Mignolo, *La idea de América Latina* (Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 2005). There is also extensive attention given to the meaning of Hispanic/Latino as a racial category. See, for example, Martha Gimenez, "Latino/"Hispanic"- Who Needs a Name? The Case Against a Standardized Terminology," in *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader Second Edition* eds. Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 93-104.

13. See psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon´s reflections, particularly his negotiation with negritude in "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" in *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 89- 119.

White.[14] In other words, if your community is wealthier and able to generate more money from property taxes, you are likely to have more funding for your education. We provide a clear monetary advantage to wealthier, White communities that translates into significant educational advantages such as increased resources and learning materials, more teachers and smaller classroom sizes, more paraprofessionals and tutors, funding for afterschool activities, funding for university preparation such as SAT and ACT prep courses, hands-on and experiential learning through field trips, and technology services as well as access to computers and iPads (even at a one-to-one student level). We must ask ourselves: why would we accept that some students deserve more money than others for their education? Is it possible that we have structured an educational system on racist practices which advantage White and wealthy communities over others?

It also seems important to briefly address a growing concern with a concept typically referred to as reverse-racism, implying that communities of color are given preference and increased opportunities at the expense of White communities. While there are a number of examples that we can also analyze to debunk a concept like reverse-racism, I will address one that is prevalent in discussions of education, particularly university admissions: affirmative action. To understand the inaccuracy of the term, we need to situate claims of "reverse-racism" in a historical context that allows us to determine its social purpose. First, though, let's begin by discussing a related yet distinct practice in university admissions: legacy admissions. Legacy admissions refer to the preference given to students in the application process whose parents had attended that university in the past. When we think of the role of legacy admissions (and affirmative action) socially, we have to consider the historical context. For example, some students have grandparents that grew up in segregated towns where they were kept away from White folks and denied many of the opportunities White communities were given. Their great-grandparents could have been forced to work for their food and a place to sleep on a White man's farm. Their great-great grandparents could have been slaves. This is all before we think about where the student and their family lives in the present (leading to inequitable school funding and the accompanying educational inequity we previously described) and contemporary racism that students and their families may face today. Though legacy admissions do not articulate a clear policy around race (meaning the policy does not explicitly state legacy admissions are for White people only), a historical analysis shows us that legacy admissions are likely to provide the most benefit to White students. The racist undertones of US history are evident in our contemporary college admissions policies.

Now let us turn to affirmative action, which consider race as a factor in the admissions process. Affirmative action does have a clear policy around race in that it attempts to provide support to students of color seeking to enter universities. However, is affirmative action reverse-racism? I argue that affirmative action is not reverse-racism, but instead affirmative action serves as an attempt to account for a long-standing legacy of racial injustice in the United States. As people of color have been excluded from opportunities that have been traditionally reserved for White communities, affirmative action attempts to provide a remedy to this challenge. Some may argue that affirmative action is not the best solution for addressing historical or contemporary racism. They may be correct in that it is not the best solution, but it is far less controversial than more radical demands such as monetary reparations and redistribution of land/property.

14. Erwin Chemerinsky, "Separate and Unequal: American Public Education Today" in *Am. UL Rev.* 52, no. 6 (2002): 1461-1475.

Race and Education

The purpose of focusing on race and racism in courses like Urban Education, Multicultural Education, and others is in great part due to the history of racism and its intersection with contemporary educational inequity. Without going into an extensive historical analysis, educational historians have unpacked the ways in which Black people were perceived as unassimilable and thus excluded entirely or relegated to the margins when developing the US educational system. Historians have also demonstrated that Indigenous peoples were originally perceived as assimilable, but only to later be treated as if their assimilation could never be truly complete.[15] The work of critical scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois,[16] Sandy Grande.[17] and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz[18] confirm these points. As Cremin[19] argues, there is no doubt that other White Ethnic groups such as the Irish and the Germans also faced discrimination. However, Cremin goes on, these groups were perceived as having the capacity of learning to be 'American,' or capable of being assimilated into the fabric of US society. Over time, we have seen numerous efforts seeking to constrain the educational opportunities of people of color such as the use of Indian boarding schools to remove Indigenous children from their families and communities to force them to adopt European/US values and habits, the active resistance by White communities against the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision which ruled that separate schools for Black and White students was unconstitutional, and anti-immigrant sentiments that result in deficit-based approaches to the education of immigrant children (which have existed since the US revolution against different groups of people and continue to the present day, particular in the case of migration from Latin America). Though racism has changed over time, it certainly has not gone away. Historically and contemporarily, racism played/plays a critical role in maintaining educational inequity.

Race and Class

Some may ask, "why do we not just focus on class when we address educational inequity?" For the analysis that follows, we can also reformulate this question to ask by centering race, are we moving away from class? The answer is both no and yes. I address each below.

On the one hand, no, addressing race does not mean we are moving away from class. The reason is that class and race are intimately linked.[20] As numerous scholars have argued, race and class are intimately related since Europeans came to the Americas in the 15th century.[21] Indigenous

15. For a more comprehensive analysis of the history of education development in the United States, see the series of works written by Lawrence A. Cremin. For an analysis specific to Black and Indigenous peoples, see his chapter "Outcasts" in *American Education: The National Experience 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 218-245.

16. In particular, Du Bois´ chapter "The Immortal Child" in *Darkwater* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999) offers an educational analysis that is significant today around school funding and investment in generations that come after.

17. Grande, *Red Pedagogy*.

18. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *An Indigenous People´s History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014). See in particular her chapter "US triumphalism and Peacetime Colonialism," 162-177.

19. Cremin, *The National Experience*, 218-245.

20. Fanon, in his essay "Racism and Culture" provides an analysis of the evolution of capitalism to suggest that racism does not disappear, but that it evolves and takes another form over time. See *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 31-44.

21. A number of Latin American decolonial scholars have argued this point. See, for instance, Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3. (2007): 449-514. See also Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" in

populations were deterritorialized (had their land taken away), murdered, and enslaved. Black populations were forcibly taken and transported to the Americas in order to serve as an enslaved labor force. This allowed Europeans (not just the British, but also the Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and French) to utilize the lands of the Western Hemisphere as well as exploit natives and enslaved populations for the construction of their wealth. In other words, capitalism as we know it was possible through racism. Thus, when we examine racism, we will also examine class.

On the other hand, yes, we are doing something different when we center race instead of class. What examining racism instead of solely class does mean, though, is that how we understand life for people of color will be different than how we understand life for White people. The conditions under which people of color live are more complex than traditional class-based analyses can capture.[22] Race has different implications for our lives. For example, Lewis Gordon[23] encourages us to think about the result if class-based struggle is successful. If there is a revolution and we achieve a classless society, does it follow that we have also eliminated racism?

If the answer is no—which in all likelihood seems to be so—then that means there is more we need to account for that escapes our concerns with class. We have to think about both economic consequences and social consequences. Race points us to concerns with class inequality, but also to concerns around social relations that rely upon some being superior and others being inferior.

An example may be helpful to unpack this idea. Let's carry out the idea that the class-based revolution is successful, and it has significant implications for education. We can return to the example of school funding. If we achieved the classless society, we can assume that we have also gotten rid of a property tax-based educational funding system. Now all students are receiving the same amount of money for their education. By providing all students with the same amount of money for their education, have we solved the problem of educational inequity? The likely answer appears to be no. We still, for example, have not addressed concerns around the negative attitudes some teachers have towards communities of color.[24] There would still be an overwhelming disproportion between the number of White teachers/administrators and student diversity.[25] Furthermore, there would be more complex questions to answer around instruction: How do we move beyond a Eurocentric perspective (focus on the experiences of White Europeans and White people from the United States) in the curriculum to include the contributions and ideas of communities of color? Is English still the primary language of instruction even in communities where, for example, most of its members are Spanish speakers?

Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate, eds. Mabel Moraña, et al, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 181-224. See also Ramon Grosfoguel "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-economy Paradigms," in *Cultural studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 211-223. See also Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 240-270.

22. In traditional Marxist analysis and even in most neo-Marxist analysis, class is made central and race is examined in terms of its impact on the means of production. An example of this in education is Mike Cole's *Marxism and Educational Theory: Origins and Issues* (London: Routledge, 2008). Mignolo addresses in part the limitations of Marxist, class-based struggle in "Delinking" (2007). Also, Maldonado Torres, in "On the Coloniality of Being*"* (2007) takes up this reasoning through a philosophical analysis of existence and being in the legacy of colonialism and coloniality.

23. See Gordon, *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism*, 176-181.

24. Raible and Irizarry provide an analysis of White teachers that are able to effectively work across lines of difference in and out of the classroom. See Jonathan Raible and Jason Irizarry, "Transracialized Selves and the Emergence of Post-White Teacher Identities," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 10, no. 2 (2007): 177-198.

25. A 2016 US Department of Education investigation reported that 82% of the teacher workforce is White and 80% of principals are White. See United States Department of Education, (2016). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce,* https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf, 1-8.

We might also consider the example of legacy admissions and the history of racism in the United States. If we have achieved a classless society, does it necessarily follow that educational policies which certainly privilege White people like legacy admissions will instantaneously disappear? Do we believe if we have a classless society, we will no longer need affirmative action to address longstanding racial inequities to support students of color getting to and through college? Class certainly influences racialized educational policies like legacy admissions, but eliminating class does not necessarily mean that we have also eliminated racial concerns.

These are only a few points that achieving a classless society would not necessarily resolve. This is not to say that class-based analyses and class-based struggles are unimportant. They are. However, by centering race we attend to concerns with class, and we also are encouraged to think about some concerns with race, racialization, and racism that are imperative in working towards educational equity.

Why are Critical Educational Studies Seen as Propaganda?

Some confuse Urban Education, Multicultural Education, or other social justice and equity-based learning with leftist propaganda promoted by an illegitimate political agenda. This logic is flawed in two ways. First, it assumes that learning can occur without a political agenda. This is false. Second, it equates leftist propaganda with concern for human suffering when they are not synonymous. I address each point below.

All education is driven by a political agenda. What do I mean by this? Paulo Freire – and a number of other scholars that build from his work[26]—argue that all education is political in that it works towards a particular goal for humanity. Making decisions about the direction of our society and participating in the shaping of young minds is certainly a political activity. Whether one is conscious of it or not, all education operates with a political agenda. Some may insist that education is neutral, or that it operates with no political agenda and in no particular direction. This is untrue. We can look again at the example of school funding. It may be in the interest of the White and wealthy communities to argue education is neutral, but low-income communities of color will indicate that school funding is demonstrative of a political agenda in education. School funding itself is determined politically! For example, legislators can determine how much money they will allocate to schools, and local governments can determine the mill rate for generating property tax. We can also consider the tension between legacy admissions and affirmative action. Affirmative action policies are almost always heavily debated as influenced by biased political agendas. However, the decision to have legacy admissions is just as much a political decision as affirmative action. The difference is that affirmative action functions to redress rather than exacerbate a history of racial inequity in education. The question in education is not whether we are working with a political agenda, but instead what is the content of our political agenda?

This brings us to the second point of confusing the political agenda of critical educational studies with leftwing propaganda. At the roots of social justice work in education is concern for our brothers and sisters in and beyond the United States. Leftwing propaganda, for some reason,

26. See, for example, Antonia Darder, *A Pedagogy of Love* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution.* (Lanham:,Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Noah De Lissovoy, *Education and Emancipation in the Neoliberal Era.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1987), as a handful of examples.

is equated with a concern for others. "Concern for others" does not fit the definition of propaganda.[27] Furthermore, "concern for others" also does not fit the definition of "left-wing" in the sense of US politics and unquestioning support for the democratic party. Rather, "concern for others" is best understood through Lila Watson's words: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

If our liberation is bound together, yet we live under structures which subjugate some so that others may dominate, this moves us to think about two things: (a) radical political alternatives to our current systems which prioritize some groups over others, such as the rich over the poor, the White over the non-White, the male and masculine over the female and feminine, the able-bodied over the differently-abled; and (b) concerns with the immediate needs of our communities contending with these challenges daily.[28] In critical educational studies, we undertake both of these challenges. This is the purpose of our critique or of our being critical, that is, the work of taking a position which allows us to look at education differently and to (re)evaluate its purpose and how it functions. We work with our imagination in order to conceive of more equitable educational practices, and we also attempt to provide our students with what they need to survive in the present. What we think we need to provide immediately and where we think we would like our society to be are determined by our political agenda.

How do we determine our political agenda? Many approach critical educational studies with the question of what can I do right now? While this energy and urgency is important, it is also an incomplete question. What can I do right now allows us to address pressing problems of the present, but we have to determine towards what future we are working and then strategize on the best way to get there. One way of doing this is by beginning our work in critical educational studies with two questions rather than one: Where are we now, and where do we want to go? This allows us to both identify concerns of the present, imagine the yet-to-be-conceived, and to take informed action to get there.

As an example, we can take up the question of school funding and college admissions policies once more. This article provided a brief examination of the origins of school funding (mostly local property tax) and its impact on educational inequity (more funding for wealthier, predominantly White neighborhoods). The thoughts put forward on class and race in terms of school funding argued that class-struggle may result in equal spending per student, but that it will not resolve all our concerns with educational equity. Furthermore, legacy admissions continue to play a role in the college admissions process, and affirmative action continues to be challenged as reverse racism in the courts.[29] It appears to be appropriate to provide accommodations for unearned privilege in the form of legacy applicants, but the legality of providing support to historically marginalized communities in the college admissions process is constantly under political attack. We can take this analysis as an examination of where are we now?

Earlier in this article, I provided a definition for pedagogy (an orientation to the world which allow us to make informed choices in teaching and learning that work towards a humanizing

27. The popular definition of propaganda suffices here: "Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view."

28. Charles Hale discusses this concept through *teoría anfibia,* or amphibian theory. He suggests our work involves both the exploration of political horizons that lead to a humanizing reality and addressing the quotidian needs of struggling people. See Charles R. Hale "Entre lo Decolonial y la Formación Racial: Luchas Afro-indígenas por el Territorio y Por (¿ o en contra de?) un Nuevo Lenguaje Contencioso" *Cuadernos de Antropología Social* 40 (2014): 34-35.

29. Consider, for instance, the most recent affirmative action lawsuit challenging the Harvard admissions process and its effect on Asian-American applicants.

future) that serves as a starting point to answer where do we want to go? As is clear here, there is a long way to go between an equitable education and our current reality. However, it is between the challenges of the present and the humanizing future we envision that shape the work we do in the meantime. As Antonio Machado wrote, "Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar." Traveler, there is no path, you make your path as you go along. The work of critical educational studies is, indubitably, the forging of paths from our ever-difficult present to the radically humanizing future.

Conclusion

Admittedly, this is only a shallow introduction to critical educational studies that limits itself to three overarching questions. Though I draw from transdisciplinary scholarship to advance my claims, I recognize the limitations of one person speaking for such a complex endeavor such as critical educational studies. It is with great enthusiasm that I welcome others to address this article as well as critical educational studies itself so that we may sharpen our political agenda, our reflections, and our actions as we work towards a better future. It is my hope that this article serves to peak interest into critical educational studies and also encourages others to read further—and beyond the traditional confines of the field of education—so that we may form responses to the most pressing educational challenges of today.

We all partake in the maintenance of educational systems. We are administrators, currently teachers, aspiring to be teachers, instructors of teacher education, and so on. In fact, we create, and we sustain the educational system as we know it. Institutions (such as the educational system, criminal justice system, etc.) are not independent of human beings. In other words, human beings create and sustain institutions. Let's imagine all of the administrators, teachers, future teachers, and professors of teacher education disappeared. Would there still be an educational system as we know it? Now let's imagine we all woke up tomorrow and we decided that all students would receive the same amount of funding for their education regardless of their zip code. Would the educational system be different? What if we decided students were able to learn in whatever language they wanted? What if we decided students did not have to get up when the bell rang, but instead were able to select where they wanted to be and what they wanted to learn? What if we decided that playing an instrument or dancing matters just as much as balancing an equation or identifying when an author uses onomatopoeia in their writing? What if we decided attending college/university should be free?

I leave in the appendix a learning activity, a syllabus structure, and a sociological-philosophical point of reflection that I have utilized in teacher preparation courses, but that I believe could also be used and modified for different audiences such as graduate students, in-service teacher professional development, and conversations among community members. This may also be helpful for education faculty and others seeking to facilitate learning around these topics.

Clearly, the challenges to resolve challenges around educational equity are not so simple as waking up with a different attitude tomorrow morning, but they do begin with a different disposition between our power as individuals giving shape to a collective and transformative vision of education. If we create and sustain the educational system, then we can also change it. There are numerous teacher strikes across the country where teachers, parents, students, and other community members have come together to change our educational systems. I would like to insist that you *can* do something about "it," and that you can do so not in spite of being a teacher, but because you are a teacher.

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Appendix

1. **It's just some definitions…**

One of the assumptions typically made when we attempt to learn together is that we all understand what we mean when we use highly complex terms such as justice, democracy, security, liberty, freedom, etc. What I have found to be a helpful pedagogical tool is encouraging students to formulate definitions of terms that are hyper-relevant to their learning. We can begin by addressing the very course title, much in the same way done in this work: what is the meaning of *urban*, *education*, and *urban education*? The same could be done in the case of related courses (e.g. *multicultural*, *education*, and *multicultural education*). A way to conduct the activity is as follows:

- The class is divided into four groups. Groups 1 and 2 will move to one side of the room, and groups 3 and 4 to the other. Groups 1 and 3 are responsible for generating a definition of *urban*, while groups 2 and 4 must generate a definition for *education.* They will have 8 minutes to do so and to write their definition on poster paper.
- Following this time, Group 1 gives their definition of *urban* to Group 2, and Group 2 gives their definition of *education* to Group 1 (Groups 3 and 4 do the same). Each group will have 4 minutes to review the definitions before them. Then, Group 1 will have two minutes to provide feedback to Group 2 regarding their definition, and Group 2 will have two minutes afterwards to provide feedback to Group 1 on their definition (Groups 3 and 4 do the same).
- Next, each group gets their original poster paper back and they have 5 minutes to incorporate feedback to modify their definition. They will write their revised definitions on a new piece of poster paper.
- After that, Groups 1 and 2 will come together, bringing their definitions of *urban* and *education.* They will, from the definitions they have generated thus far, take a new piece of poster paper and provide a definition for *urban education.* Groups 3 and 4 would do the same. They will have 5 minutes to do so.
- Finally, Groups 1 and 2 can place their definitions of *urban*, *education,* and *urban education* along one wall of the classroom while Groups 3 and 4 do the same along the opposite wall. Groups 1 and 2 can go and look at the definition generated by their peers in Group 3 and 4, and vice versa.
- Students then return to their seats and, both in their small groups and as a whole class, discuss the similarities and differences between the definitions as well as any questions that came about in the process.

I believe it is fruitful for students to construct their own definitions and realize the difficulty of not only generating definitions, but also constructing consensus in only a couple of words that make up the course title. Though it might seem that when a student signs up to take *Urban Education* they know exactly what it means, this exercise can demonstrate that even the course title has a more complicated meaning than we thought.

2. **Whose structure is it anyway?**

Courses addressing educational equity often build from critical writers in the field of education to address some of our most pressing concerns in schools and the classroom. In addition to these critical educational scholars, I suggest re-structuring our Urban Education (and other social justice and equity-based courses) to express a philosophical, political, or sociological question in relation to education throughout the course. The weekly course readings would be structured so that we

address a major theme of the week through both a critical scholar typically outside the traditional educational canon as well as through critical educational scholars. For example, a theme we can find in educational equity courses is the achievement gap. As a weekly theme, we can pose the question *what is achievement?* The more theoretical reading could be Du Bois' chapter "The Immortal Child" from *Darkwater.* The readings more specific to education could be Ansell's explanation of the achievement gap[30] and Ladson-Billings' conceptualization of the educational debt[31]. There could also be supplementary readings like the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) report on policy recommendations to close the opportunity gap. This weekly class structure would allow us to move away from the broad and often justice-light work of trying to tackle an '-ism' or a '-phobia' every week (i.e. sexism week 1, racism week 2, xenophobia week 3). What the weekly theme allows us to do is to engage with a concept significant to educational equity (as in achievement) and do so in a manner that allows for both structured as well as organic dialogue not constrained to the -ism or -phobia of the week.

Furthermore, my experience with such a structure leads me to believe that students are capable of developing intimate links between the challenges intellectuals like Fanon, hooks, or Marx outline in their works and the challenges we face in education. When we read authors whose work does not center on schools and the classroom, our leadings questions are *what are they trying to tell us about education?* and *how might this inform our work in education?* For instance, a Dominican student reading Fanon's chapter "On Violence" from *The Wretched of the Earth* moved her to discuss immigration, displacement, and her culturally insensitive and monolingual education in the United States in the context of colonial and racial terror in the Dominican Republic and in the Western hemisphere more broadly. Another student, after reading bell hooks' *Understanding Patriarchy,* went on to think about how he, as an aspiring elementary education teacher, could teach in a way that defies the expectations of patriarchal masculinity and works toward a deeper human connectivity. Students in the course also asked themselves these leading questions as they worked through texts in other classes. A student of political science who chose to take Urban Education of his own volition examined concerns with school funding through a Marxist perspective that highlighted the obstacles class inequality plays in education.

Thus, it is my belief that we can restructure our curricula so that it can incorporate texts traditionally outside the field of education, enable students to make connections between these other thinkers and our contemporary educational challenges.

3. **It's broken, so what do you think?**

One of the consistently frustrating experiences in my time as a classroom teacher was the emphasis on working within the system as we know it rather than stopping and asking whether we believed what we were doing was *good.* For example, professional development workshops and staff meetings often revolved around concerns with attendance, student behavior, and raising test scores. In these experiences, I never had a conversation where we stopped to ask *is this really the best for our students? What is it that we are actually trying to do here? What is the purpose of school, and what is our responsibility as teachers?*

The purpose of questions such as these is not necessarily to build consensus, but to reflect upon the assumptions under which we operate and become conscious of competing and alternative perspectives that may be of more benefit to our students. A common objection by teachers working in often stressful and even hostile climates, particularly in this era of increased standardized testing

30. See Ansell (2011).
31. See Ladson-Billings (2006).

and teacher evaluations, is that they are uninterested in ideas that do not translate into something immediate. In other words, if workshop facilitators or administrators are going to expect teachers to attend these meetings, then these sessions better provide an immediate strategy teachers can take to the classroom. While these concerns are certainly important, they fail to understand that reflection is what allows us to do something more than just survive in this current system (as we have partially discussed in the section addressing the relationship between education and pedagogy).

I believe it is fruitful to close this article with a reflection on responsibility and the construction of institutions such as the educational system. In-service teachers as well as pre-service teachers may hear a powerful analysis of the failures of education. For example, we know schools are disproportionately funded. Current and future teachers will hear this and say something along the lines of *yes, this is true, but I can't do anything about it. I'm just a classroom teacher.* However, is it true that they cannot do anything about it? I want to suggest that they can do something about it, but that we are often discouraged from doing something about it as teachers, as I clarify in the conclusion below.

Homeless Students' Lived Experiences in Postsecondary Institutions and Academe: A Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study of homeless students' existential experiences was focused on urban community colleges and postsecondary vocational schools and universities. Homeless students encounter unique existential challenges, yet homeless students have proven abilities to access resources essential for their academic pursuits. The study results showed homeless students are attracted to institutions with open-door polices that facilitate access to financial resources and are staffed by accommodating faculty. Among this study's findings are that homeless students camouflaged ubiquitous signs of their homelessness by concealing their indigent status. Yet, homeless students sought and desired to socialize and maintain relationships with their peers. All the participants in this study were pursuing their studies with ambitions and aspirations to graduate and start businesses to emancipate themselves from homelessness and re-enter the macro-society. This data driven study contributes new insight to the phenomenon of homeless students and new knowledge on homeless students' life worlds and their existential experiences in higher education institutions. The study's findings, applications, and usefulness target natural audiences made of educators, academic administrators, and private and political stakeholders. Additionally, this study may be used to advocate for the welfare of homeless students to private and public agencies as well as organizations that promote social policies for indigent populations, including development projects of residential hostelry for homeless students.

Keywords: *homeless students; urban public community colleges; postsecondary vocational institutions; social marginalization; poverty; residential hostelry*

Homelessness in the United States

According to Hombs (2011), a homeless person is "an individual or family who lacks a regular, fixed and adequate nighttime residence" (p. 182). There are 39.7 million persons living in poverty in the United States; amongst them are the homeless (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2018) reported that 552,830 individuals were homeless at some point in 2018. Homelessness is not a new phenomenon by any means, as this has been a social reality affecting individuals and families for generations (Eisenberg, A. (2018). The definition of a homeless person is as follows:

> an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, [and sleeps in public or private places not designated] for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping

> accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, a bus or train station, airport, or camping ground. (Hombs, 2011, p. 182; Donley, A. M., Crisafi, D., Mullins, A., & Wright, J. D., 2017).

Both HUD (2010) and Hombs (2011) discussed and defined what a home is, or what it should be, as follows: "Homes, at the very least, should be shelters from cold and protection from predation. But for the least among us, home is a heating grate or a tarp in the park" (Szeintuch,2017; Hombs, 2011, p. 58).

Study Background

Our first exposure to homeless students was in 2010 and again in 2013 through an encounter with a homeless army veteran and student who had served in Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm, and had benefited from the GI Bill (enacted in 1944), to further his education. The encounter ignited our curiosity and interest in the student homelessness phenomenon that led to this study, on the campuses of Alfa College in Miami, Beta College in Broward, and other postsecondary public vocational institutions (PSPVIs) in Florida.

Homelessness in Current Landscape in Higher Education

Currently, there is no comparable written legislation similar to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (PL 100-77), enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1987, and reauthorized in 1997, as a legislative response to mitigate homelessness (Helvie, 1999; Szeintuch, 2017). Admittedly, there is no legislation like the McKinney-Vento Act that champions and supports homeless individuals seeking postsecondary education. Additionally, there is a shortage of studies specific to the life-worlds of this segment of homeless students in the postsecondary and higher education institutions (Apple, 2005; Field, 2015; Hallett, 2010). The growth of homeless students in public school grades K-12 and in higher education is undeniable and growing (Field, 2015; Hallett, 2010; Hombs, 2011; Landsman, 2006).

Literature Review

There is literature on the homeless and homelessness in general (Amster, 2008; Hall, 2007; Hombs, 2011; Knowlton, 2006; Murphy & Tobin, 2008), and literature focused on cases of homeless families and children, youths, and veterans (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Levinson & Ross, 2007; Swick, 2005). Studies focused on homeless students in public higher education institutions were limited, journalistic, and not data-driven inquiries. Consequently, the literature reviewed lacked substantive existential accounts and data of matriculated homeless students (Hallet, 2010; Hippensteele Mobley & Tanabe, 2011; Juchniewicz, 2012; Toro, 2006). The societal approach to students' homelessness in institutions of higher education was subordinated and not discussed, but subdued as a subject matter heard occasionally in private rumor mills (Broadbent, 2008; Hallett, 2010; Hippensteele Mobley & Tanabe, 2011; Juchniewicz, 2012; Shaw & Goldrick-Rab, 2006).

Homeless and Homelessness in the Modern Era

The image of the homeless individual has evolved significantly and changed as shown in books written about "hobos" in the 1920s and 1930s, who were drifters and/or individuals "riding the rails." In the 1980s and as recently as 2019, the image of a homeless individual is that of a marginal individual (Hombs, 2011; Lawton, 2010; Levinson & Ross, 2007; Metraux, Clegg, Daigh, Culhane, & Kane, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Ramey, 2008; Rogers & Marshall, 2012; Snow, Soule, & Cress, 2005; Toro, 2006). Homelessness as a social phenomenon has greatly increased due to servicemen and women returning from foreign conflicts, and the shortage of affordable rental houses or scarcity of single room occupancy (SRO) in urban areas (Elbogen, Sullivan, Wolfe, Wagner, & Beckham, 2013; Hopper & Hamberg, 1984; Tsai, Kasprow & Rosenheck, 2013). As a result, homelessness was no longer romanticized, but became prevalent due to poverty and ostracism of the homeless due to their recognizable marginalized lifestyles, and poverty-stricken living conditions (Levinson & Ross, 2007; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). As Skid Row's homeless in California began to attract media coverage, studies investigating this social phenomenon began to emerge and be published (de Bradley, 2008; Ropers, 1988; Toro, 2006). Homelessness was now being addressed as a social issue that required in-depth studies in order to formulate possible solutions (Amster, 2008; Toro, 2006; Tsai et al., 2013). Hence, solutions began to be designed and implemented by private and public initiatives to provide shelters and to cater to the physical and nutritional needs of the homeless in the urban areas (Dworsky, 2010; Hersberger, 2005; Hombs, 2011; McNaughton, 2008).

The historical drivers and causes of mass homelessness were attributed to environmental and ecological catastrophes, such as the Dust Bowl and the economic depression of the 1930s. These historical occurrences generated large numbers of unemployed and underemployed ex-military personnel returning to the United States from foreign wars of the 1940s (WWII), Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Elbogen et al., 2013; Tsai et al., 2013; van den Berk-Clark & McGuire, 2013; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Nowadays, homelessness is attributed to complex identifiable and stratified factors such as societal, personal, relational with the breakdown of family life, domestic violence, economic and structural policies, poverty, and politics that negatively impact the life-worlds of homeless students in PSPVIs and the urban public community colleges (UPCC) (Adair, 2005; Algert, Reitel & Renvall, 2006; Dill, 2010; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; McBride; 2012; Ramey, 2008; Shaw & Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Swick, 2005).

Theoretical Framework Supporting the Study

This study's theoretical framework was based on van Manen's (1990) theory as he wrote, "human science was aimed at explicating the meaning of human phenomena" (p. 4). Additionally, van Manen argued that "an appropriate topic for phenomenological inquiry was determined by the questioning of the essential nature of a lived experience: a certain way of being in the world" (p. 39). Van Manen's framing of his theory intersects and connects into Maslow's (1971) with focus on the theoretical framework on poverty, and basic needs of livelihood and dignity. Maslow's stratified hierarchy of needs encompassing a 5-level matrix of motivational and intrinsic factors was considered in this study as a requirement in support of a constructivist perspective meshed with textual and hermeneutical analysis used to interpret and apply the theoretical frameworks to gain insight into the life-worlds and existential experiences of homeless students in postsecondary public vocational institutions (PSPVIs) and urban public community colleges (PCCS), (see Figure 1).

Achieving Life-Purpose: Academic, Professional, Lifetime Goal
Recognition: Respect, Appreciated, Contributor in Society
Socialization: Peers, Friends, Family, Faculty, Neighbors
Safety Requirements: Security, Stability, Job, Free from Bonds of Fear
Bio-Physiological Needs: Food/Beverages, Shelter, Privacy, Home

Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is adaptable to homeless students' motivational needs.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to carry out a hermeneutic-phenomenological investigation on homeless student participants' perceptions of constructed realities, in the context of their life-worlds and existential experiences in higher education environments (Hallett, 2010; Heppner & Heppner, 2004). This study design is naturally suited to the tradition of a qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological approach using survey-questionnaires, and expected responses and data collected in written narratives. The study participants (N = 10) were literally and officially homeless students in the targeted UPCCs and/or PSPVIs located in Miami Dade and Broward counties, in South Florida. The 10 participants included, both male and female homeless students enrolled in UPCCs and/or PSPVIs. Data collected were secured, processed, and analyzed using conventional methods, and the computer-assisted tool NVivo 10 qualitative analytical software. "In other words, phenomenological research consisted of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tended to be obscure, that which tended to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32).

Results

Participant Demographics Data

The participants referenced in the table were homeless students matriculated and active with their studies, in their respective urban vocational and higher educational institutions. Obviously, homelessness of students, as a sociological phenomenon affect both male and female learners, in urban core, in South Florida.

Table 1

Demographics Data for All Participants

Code	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Yrs. as homeless	College pseudonym	Degree	Grad yr.	County
P1	Male	38	Hispanic	4	Alfa	AA	2017	Miami-Dade
P2	Male	45	Hispanic	3.3	Alfa	AS	2017	Miami-Dade
P3	Male	45	Hispanic	3	Alfa	AS	2017	Miami-Dade
P4	Male	28	Hispanic	1.6	Alfa	AS	2017	Miami-Dade

P5	Male	25	Black Ind	4	Tech College	AS	2017	Broward
P6	Male	30	Black American	1	Beta	AA	2015	Broward
P7	Male	19	Black	1.1	Alfa	AS	2018	Miami-Dade
P8*	Female	29	Latina	13	Alfa	AS	2015	Miami-Dade
P9*	Female	52	Caucasian	32	Alfa	AS	2018	Miami-Dade
P10*	Female	21	Latina	1	Alfa	AS	2015	Miami-Dade

Note. Respondents' full names were coded (P1 Alfa, P2 Beta, P3 Delta, etc.); subsequently, the participants' numeric codes were compressed without their acronyms (P1, P2, P3, etc.), as designated in respondents' names on survey questionnaires. Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

All the participants recruited and retained during the data collection phase in the 2015 Spring term attended their respective educational institutions. The final count of seven male and three female homeless students were retained as participants in this study. Among the 10 homeless students recruited, eight students came from Alfa College, a UPCC in Miami-Dade County; one male student was from Beta College, and one other male student from a PSPVI in Broward county.

Questionnaires

Participants were given individual packages containing the questionnaire and required to answer all the questions and return their responses sealed in envelopes provided to preserve the documents from damage and the rain. Some participants were dropped for not filling in the questionnaires fully as prescribed, thus disqualifying them from participating in the study. Participants were given token gift cards as an incentive for their participation and a list of essential addresses of organizations serving the homeless.

Data Analysis

The researchers created Microsoft Word document (MWD) files that contained demographic data and other textual contents that were transformed and reduced to chunks, by using cut-and-paste manual and computer-processed methods, and then saved in the folders. The MWD files held combined respondents' thematic word concepts (TWCs) generated after original texts were read, reread, analyzed, and subjected to further analytical searches for emergent textual patterns to obtain data transformations and their results. The process included MWD files, in which the aggregated thematic phrases, words, and paragraphs from the survey responses were highlighted, coded, recoded in thematic phrases, and repeatedly and iteratively analyzed to generate data outputs and results using NVivo 10.

Structured Data Presentation and Analysis of Results

The data analysis and results are presented in a structured order for readers to understand the methodological approach and the assumptions that underpinned this study. Data reported in tables are aligned to the study questions, and the respondents' thematic phrases and word concepts written side-by-side in parallel to results from NVivo 10 analytic data outputs. The instructional goal to display data results from the survey questionnaires are valid, clear, logical, and meaningful to understand the phenomenon studied. The data results presented in the following sections are in descending order, as in the survey questionnaires: Question A was first on the survey questions,

followed by Question B, then by Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for a total of seven questions. Tables and figures serve to highlight summative results of textual and word concepts data.

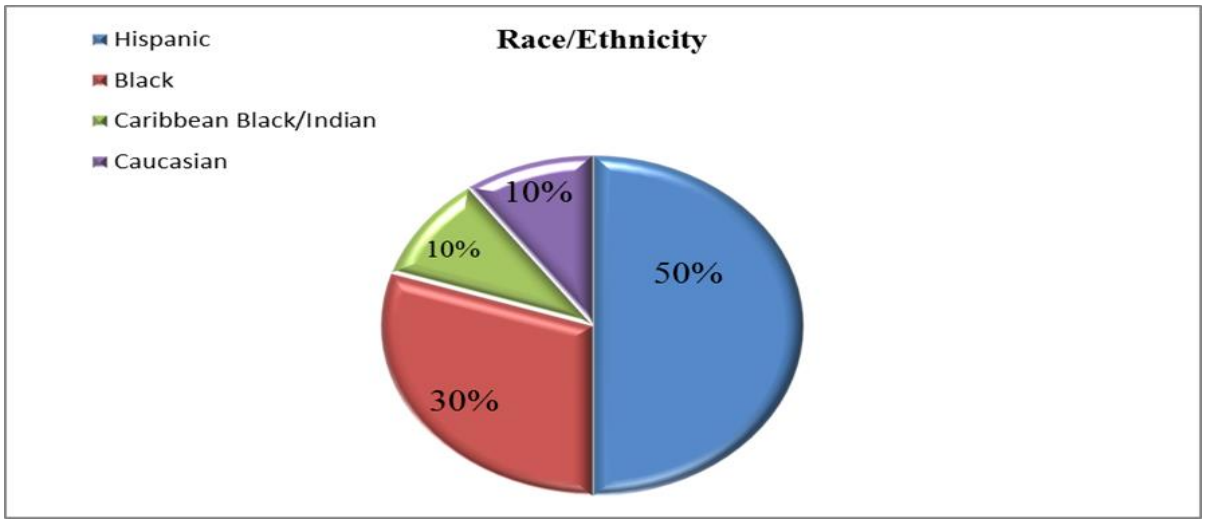

Figure 2. Demographic chart of race and ethnicity. The pie sections coded in blue represents the Hispanic ethnic group as the largest cohort of the population, and the section color coded red represents the Blacks ethnic cohort, green represents the Caribbean Black/Indian, and purple represents the cohort of ethnic Caucasian.

Table 2

Results of Survey Question A Data Analysis and Outputs File

A. What were the reasons or causes that led the participants to become homeless?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"I lost my job in 2012; I was wrongfully terminated."	"Loss of job and dismissal." (R11)
P2	"One day I arrived home and found I have been locked out; my possessions were discarded in the garbage."	"Evicted by the landlord, personal possession thrown out." (R30)
P3	"My parent stopped enabling me and asked me to leave their home... Priority to party & use of substances."	"Parent decision and intervention." (R25) "Use of illicit substances." (R21)
P4	"Crossed illegally, where my odyssey started."	"Result of resource starved illegal emigration." (R36)
P5	"Lack of support."	"Lack of support from family." (R32)
P6	"I decided to turn to life of crime." "I decided to stick to drug dealing."	"Consequence of being a convict or felon" (R40) "Result of post-incarceration policies." (R38)

P7	"I did not have key like in the other houses."	"Resources starved legal emigration." (R37)
P8*	"Kicked out from friends' houses."	"Consequence of dysfunctional family." (R33)
P9*	"I've been an addict for 32 years."	"Drug addiction." (R22)
P10*	"Family situations I had to endure."	"Consequence of dysfunctional family." (R33)

Note. R11, R30, R21, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question A

The analytical coverage of 10 homeless student participants' responses to Survey Question A was 0.66%. Survey Question A was focused on what causations participants felt had led them to homelessness. Key analytical results reported and summed up as causations were the "Consequence of dysfunctional family" (R33); "Consequences of external economic factors" (R7); "[The] loss of job, dismissal, termination and lack of employment and poverty" (R11); and lastly, the issue of affordability as the participants were "Out priced for rental" (R12).

Table 3

Results of Survey Question B Data Analysis and Outputs File

B. What were participants' reasons for choosing the vocational or community college they are attending now?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"I choose Alfa College because of its reputation and its proximity... I wanted to learn graphic design and get a degree."	"Good location accessibility." (R7) "Students achieved their dreams and career goals." (R13)
P2	"Super awesome great school to come and learn."	"Great school with resources affordable." (R16)
P3	"A friend of mine told me I needed to mature and return to college."	"Based on friend recommendation." (R11)
P4	"Alfa College has a program for homeless students."	"Open to underprivileged student and the homeless." (R5)
P5	"I could make monthly payment for school... Affordable ways to pay for school."	"Availability of financial aid and low tuition." (R22) "Affordable fees, offers scholarships and loans." (R26)
P6	"Financial aid from Beta College."	"Availability of financial aid low tuition and affordable."(R 23)

P7	"Was easy to enroll myself, and easy to get ride."	"Open door and access policies." (R2)
P8*	"I was able to attend college for free."	"Offer of scholarships, grants and loans." (R26)
P9*	"I wanted to get a degree in addiction studies... They help me to succeed in doing this."	"Instructors are accommodating." (R35)
		"Instructors are willing to help students." (R31)
P10*	"College offered me financial aid and scholarship."	"Scholarships and grants." (R26)

Note. R7, R13, R16, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question B

The analytical coverage of 10 homeless student participants on Survey Question B was 0.73%. Survey Question B was focused on what the participants' reasons were for choosing their respective UPCCs and/or PSPVIs. Emergent analysis and data results included the following: "[The] instructors were willing to help students, and were accommodating and treated students equally the same" (R33); "Affordable fees, offer of scholarships, grants and loans" (R26); and accessibility "For students with little resources, [there was] availability of financial aid, and [to pay] low tuition, resources" (R22).

Table 4

Results of Survey Question 1 Data Inputs and Analysis File

1. How do homeless students access academic resources and services for their specific needs?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"I joined various programs that helped the poor and low income... I donated blood and plasma twice a week to earn about $250 monthly."	"Miami Rescue Mission and Wal-Mart." (R32)
		"Monthly selling blood and plasma." (R38)
P2	"I received financial aid from Camillus House... . of course, from some student collaboration and friendship."	"From local organization, Camillus House." (R24)
		"Borrowing money from classmates." (R46)
P3	"By applying for grants and scholarships"	"Financial aid specifically provided to homeless." (R16)
P4	"By working here and there."	"Income from part-time work." (R44)
P5	"To pay for school I did lots of small jobs... Loan from school for books."	"Aid for tuition and books." (R14)

P6	"Financial aid from Beta College... Panhandling, and part-time work, or door-to-door selling."	"Availability of financial aid low tuition and affordable." (R 23) "Panhandling in highways' arteries and help from peers." (R54)
P7	"Because of financial aid… Sometimes a friend helped me out, my father or sister."	"Parental and family assistance." (R52)
P8*	"I was able to attend college for free; my financial aid covered all cost... "Some books, the rest I obtained from work."	"Financial aid for tuition and books." (R14)
P9*	"As disable they helped me. They helped me to fill out the paperwork needed to attend college."	"Resources for disable students." (R37)
P10*	"College offered me financial aid and scholarship. The library has most of the books, and computers that I can use."	"Scholarships and grants." (R26) Resources from the libraries." (R26)

Note. R32, R38, R24, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question 1

The analytical coverage of 10 homeless student participants' responses to Survey Question 1 of this study was 0.87%. The core results from the analysis indicated firstly, "[From] house and other faith-based organizations, Miami Rescue Mission, Camillus House, and Wal-Mart" (R30); "Availability of students' loan assistance" (R19); and institutional resources available and assistance for homeless students, such as accessibility to computer "[For] search for scholarship, and the grants and collateral resources" (R49).

Table 5

Results of Survey Question 2 Data Inputs and Analysis

2. What experiences were unique for being a homeless student in your educational institution?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"I have been harassed by Miami Police Department… Threatened by thugs and crackheads… Life was different from my peers I was always in survival mode."	"Harassed by law enforcement [and] seen as criminals." (R23)
P2	"It was a terrible shock and grievous and new reality moment for me… The main impediment obvious, lack money, resources, and daily life provision."	"Homeless were adaptable to circumstances." (R20) "Homeless embraces spirituality." (R21)
P3	"Opportunity to move forward and be independent."	"Homeless perceive themselves as independent." (R18)

P4	"It was a nightmare in the streets… It was embarrassing so that's right to keep it very confidential."	"Homeless are looked as though they are diseased or contaminant." (R12) "Fear of public exposure of one's homeless status." (R39)
P5	"I would go to a facility…for a shower and slept wherever I could…. We are all under the same routine every day."	"When and where to take a shower and where to wash." (R45)
P6	"It seemed like you are separated from everybody… You have to eat a lot of pride to still go to school while homeless."	"Not respected, source of threats in educational sites." (R30)
P7	"I couldn't go too early where I stay… I can provide nobody the address where I live, I didn't really have one."	"I have no home address; I have no keys." (R50) "I cannot invite anyone." (R52)
P8*	"It was difficult… Worries about safety when sleeping in the car… I worry if I will get kicked out from friends' houses."	"Fear sleeping in the car, and eviction." (R35)
P9*	"I didn't have time to think about my surrounding."	"To new realities, priority maintaining one's wellbeing." (R59)
P10*	"It was difficult and stressful… I try to hide it as much as possible."	"Concealing my status." (R54)

Note. R12, R39, R45, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question 2

Key data identified from 10 participants' responses and their textual thematic phrases and TWC results emerged from Survey Question 2. Total coverage by 10 homeless student participants' responses to Survey Question 2 was 0.68%. The results of the analysis indicated the following answers: "Homelessness was a nightmare and embarrassing" (R9); "Sources of threats in the educational sites [and] from other homeless" (R30); the homeless were "Harassed by the law-enforcement [and] seen as [outlaws]" (R23); and "Collateral sources of worries, educational trials and hardships when and where to do assignments" (R43/44).

Table 6

Results of Survey Question 3 Data Analysis and Outputs

3. How do homeless students perceive their social interactions with their domiciled peers and classmates?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"My peers and classmates did not know I was homeless... Homeless would rather say they are not because of shame."	"I concealed my homelessness to my peers." (R35) "Maintains some relations and contact." (R10)

P2	"Not different... Really many don't have to know... Time spent with my classmates reduced somewhat."	"Few contacts, I concealed my homeless status to my peers." (R34)
P3	"It sometimes became very overwhelming, and also rewarding."	"Other times it was rewarding, and normal." (R42)
P4	"Contacts were casual and informative... Nobody in my class was aware that I'm homeless."	"I concealed my homeless status to my peers no one." (R35)
P5	"We treated each other like family... We spent time together outside of school every day."	"We went out together." (R17)
P6	"I tried to spend as little time as possible with them... I just didn't like to let them know how I'm living."	"To my peers no one knows where I lived." (R36) "I share only my aspirations and dreams." (R15)
P7	"I would say very poor... Because of no phone or internet, I couldn't meet them nowhere."	"Homeless socialization is very poor." (R32) "No collective social activities." (R25)
P8*	"Many knew my situation and did not judge me."	"We went out together." (R17)
P9*	"I had no problems with the students... Students were curious how I got to that situation."	"All the contacts were normal." (R38)
P10*	"I tried to make friends... Enjoyed socializing with my peers."	"It was normal and tried to make friends." (R44)

Note. R35, R10, R34, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question 3

Key data identified from 10 participants' responses and their textual thematic phrases and TWC results emerged from Survey Question 3. Total coverage of 10 homeless student respondents to Survey Question 3 of the study was 0.82%. The respondents' key perceptions and emergent results were as follows: "[The] quality of socialization was normal" (R40); "With addicts and other homeless socialization was very poor" (R30); most of the respondents "Dreamt to go out together, [and had] inspirational and good informative relationship" (R17); "[they had] no collective social activities and entertainment, we could not meet" (R25).

Table 7

Results of Survey Question 4 Data Inputs and Analysis

4. How do homeless students perceive their relationships with instructors in the classrooms?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"I was treated well by instructors and programs directors... Only in private have I told my professors and instructors about my situation."	"Good relationship with understanding." (R10) "I did confide to some instructors" (R20)
P2	"Excellent ... they tried to give they love [sic], support and financial assistance… Respected and valued me."	"Treat with respect like any other student." (R8) "Shocked to learn about my status." (R22)
P3	"I wanted to be treated as everyone else... "I wasn't used to get any special treatment."	"Without favoritism, treated equally with respect like my peers." (R13)
P4	"My relationship with my instructors was very good... My relationship with the teachers was "warm and friendly."	"With respect like my peers, friendly and warm contacts." (R15)
P5	"My instructors didn't treat me any different than any other student."	"Treated equally with respect like any other student." (R11)
P6	"Overall, the instructors treated me with respect... Instructors they really did not know my situation."	"Yet I conceal my homelessness." (R24) "Treat equally with respect like my peers." (R13)
P7	"We had a good relationship in class and it was supposed to be between teacher and student."	"Cordial understanding and kind." (R9)
P8*	"Majority of my instructors were understanding when I did explain the situation to them."	"I did confide to some instructors." (R20) "Some were accommodating." (R5)
P9*	"My instructors knew my situation and my story and they love it."	"Did confide to some instructors." (R17)
P10*	"My instructors liked me... I tried to participate in class and get good grades on test."	"Friendly and warm contacts in." (R14)

Note. R10, R20, R8, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question 4

Key data from 10 homeless student participants emerged from responses to Survey Question 4. Total coverage of 10 homeless student participants' responses to Survey Question 4, was

0.93%. The respondents expressed perceptions of qualities of relations as follows: "[With] my homeless status, some [instructors] were accommodating and treated [me] with respect like any other student" (R7); "Good relationship with understanding, and good interactions without favoritism and treated equally with [respect]" (R10/11); "Yet, in class, I concealed my homelessness" (R 24); "I did confide to some instructors, and some were shocked to learn [I was homeless]" (R 20); and "Warm contacts in some cases" (R 17).

Table 8

Results of Survey Question 5 Data Inputs and Analysis

5. What are the participants' post-graduation aspirations and dreams?

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"Plan to become stable and established... I would like to help the homeless... I wanted a normal life."	"Get a stable life." (R19) "Work with the homeless." (R28)
P2	"I was not really sure." "Work."	"I did not know what to do." (R46)
P3	"I would like to open my own business" "A dual-diagnose center."	"Own and operate my business." (R11) "Open a dual diagnostic center." (R 16)
P4	"I would further my studies, get a medical doctorate, bring my family and own medical practice."	"Further my studies to HBCU for Master and PhD." (R6) "Bring in my family." (R28)
P5	"Start with a job, build my resume, get a masters and a PhD, and own a business."	"PhD to be certified and transfer to four-year universities." (R7)
P6	"My dream is to own multibillion-dollar company."	"Own and operate my business." (R9)
P7	"I wanted to find a good job, in hospital… Have economic stability and go back to my country."	"Experience economic stability and start a family." (R21)
P8*	"Help the homeless students and homeless community."	"Work with the homeless in higher education." (R30)
P9*	"Open a three-quarter way house for recovering addicts."	"Operate a house for recovering addicts." (R34)
P10*	"To become a family and marriage therapist."	"Become family and marriage therapist." (R35)

Note. R19, R28, R46, etc. are NVivo numeric references (see results). Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.

Key Data Summary: Survey Question 5

The 10 homeless student participants responded to Survey Question 5. The total coverage level of analytic results on Survey Question 5 was 0.96%; however, of the textual and numeric data outputs, as referenced written results, only a limited number of key thematic phrases and TWCs are included in Table 8. The results included the following: "[To] pursue higher degrees" (R5); "Get a stable life, experience economic stability and get married" (R19); "Own a medical practice, an investment company, start a three quarter way house" (R13); "Bring my family" (R28); and "Operate a house for recovering addicts" (R31/32).

Deviant X-Factor Data from Participants' Responses

Divergent X-Factor Data from Participants' Responses Identification of deviant textualthematic phrases (DTTP) and TWCs was made after reading, reflecting, and engaging the texts indialogic and iterative questioning of respondents P1, P2, P6, and P7's survey responses on Survey Questions 2 and 5. Subsequently, data themes that emerged as divergent were highlighted and coded from the texts using a combination of both computer and cut-and paste manual methods. Next, the Microsoft Word document (MWD) files that contained the divergent X-factor data were reprocessed, coded, and auto-recoded and analyze through the NVivo query wizard for authentication of their unique nature as data results. The summary of data outputs of deviant cases are shown below. Divergent (X) Factor Data Select numbers of the responses by P1, P2, P6, and P7 were categorized as unusual data, or deviant for being out of range of conformity and appropriateness in relation to the study questions. According toShenton and Hay-Gibson (2009), divergent data "do not conform to the prevailing patterns that have been identified" (p. 30). Therefore, divergent X-factor data were peculiar results from textual thematic phrases that emerged from data analysis and the data outputs from four participants' textual handwritten survey responses. These divergent cases were from the participants' responses to Questions 1 and 5, as displayed in Table 9.

Divergent (X) Factor Data

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Table 9

X-Factors from Participants' Responses to Questions 2 and 5

Participant	Textual phrases or TWCs	NVivo 10 participants' results
P1	"Since my BA in languages has not helped me find a career." (Q2)	"Believed previous humanities' degree conferred no transferable skills." (R61)
P2	"I did not know what to do about the future after graduation." (Q5)	"I didn't know what to do." (R46)
P3	None identified	Not applicable
P4	None identified	Not applicable
P5	None identified	Not applicable
P6	"Would be able to speak foreign language or have a translator with." (Q5)	"I want to speak foreign languages." (R48)
P7	"I wanted to go back to my country to help and change some things that didn't go well." (Q 5)	"Return home to help the people." (R44)
P8*	None identified	Not applicable
P9*	None identified	Not applicable
P10*	None identified	Not applicable

Note. Q2: What experiences were unique for being a homeless student in your educational institution? Q5: What are the participants' post-graduation aspirations and dreams?
**Respondents with asterisks following their code names were females.*

Key Data Summary

The divergent factors were from data labeled as X factors. Data with unseemly patterns and labeled as divergent X factors were noteworthy answers to Questions 2 and 5 as follows: "[He longed to] return home to help the people" (R 60); "I did not know what to do" (R43); "I wanted to speak foreign languages" (R48); and "my BA in languages has not helped me find a [job] career" (R60).

Reflection

Admittedly, conducting and completing this study on homeless students was not an easy proposition. Homelessness of students as a sociological phenomenon was counterintuitive intel-

lectually. The sociological, physical, emotional and material challenges encountered daily, as experiential realities while pursuing education in urban higher education institutions, while being student and homeless was a wrenching discovery. Primarily, because it was counter intuitive to be homeless, and yet, a student in higher education institution. Furthermore, socially it was shocking to trigger a string of questions, as to why, in the State of Florida, and the United States of America the richest nation in the world, how come students in urban higher education institutions were homeless? Rationally, it was expected that students enrolled in urban higher education institutions were domiciled with official houses, apartments, or rooms to sleep, and receive their mails, and freely go in and out at will, and cook their meals when off school. Unfortunately, homeless students lived experiences were different, and characterized by uncertainties, and basically for lacking known official homes compared to, and taken for granted by their peers such as, where to sleep, take a shower, cook and eat a hot meal, and be safe while doing academic work, in their homes. The homeless students are obviously virtual to the general public, for matter of facts that homeless students have crafted and learnt strategically to conceal their social status and conditions. In addition, the seamless ways homeless students enter and navigate between the different worlds around them, precisely into the macro-society world, and the world of academia, with its culture and expectations, and finally, going to reside and sleep rough in unstable sub-world of the poor and the nameless (Sean, Kidd, et al, 2016).

Hence, the researchers' discovery and access to the world of urban homeless students was an epiphany, that compelled us to admit that we were ignorant about the homeless and homelessness phenomena. Studies on homeless students' existential experiences in the UPCCs and the PSPVIs were scarce and/or limited in the academic literature reviewed. Therefore, this study provides new knowledge and insights about the uniqueness of this segment of learners enrolled but invisible in higher education institutions. Consequently, this study has provided new perspectives and understanding of homeless students' worldviews and lived experiences as marginalized and underprivileged learners in the UPCCs and/or the PSPVIs (Hallett, 2010; Stronge & Reed-Victor, 2000). This study's usefulness and applicability are sociological, instructional, and data-driven for actionable policies. To summarize, this study provides new insights and data for use by academics, operators of shelters, policy makers, and a host of stakeholders in political and social organizations caring for and seeking to improve the existential and educational conditions of homeless students in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

Homeless students' life-worlds and experiences in this study showed that homelessness of students in urban vocational and higher educational institutions are undeniable. The existential and experiential lives of the participants were unique compared to the general population of domiciled and economically challenged Floridians. The participants experienced social isolation, hardships, marginalization, and disinvestment in relationships, in addition to relegation into anonymity (Algert et al., 2006; Field, 2015; Hallet & Crutchfield, 2017; McBride, 2012; O'Sullivan Oliveira & Burke, 2009). The participants' daily lives differed from that of many of their peers and housed classmates. Undeniably, homelessness had consigned these student participants into the lower fringes of the society and close to obscurity, where most individuals lost their humanness, freedom, and respect. They also lost the privilege to enjoy activities of life taken for granted by the general population and their peers such as strolling in commercial districts, loitering in public venues, or entering the malls, libraries, and other public buildings without being subjected to inquisitive looks, and probable interventions of the law enforcement and security guards. Nevertheless, this

cohort of homeless students demonstrated their foresight, willingness, and courage to change their fortunes. Thus, the 10 participants made choices to strive and come out of their social isolation and marginalized lives by enrolling into the UPCCs and/or the PSPVIs. These student participants understood that education was the right pathway that could lead to personal emancipation, life transformation, and social reintegration into the mainstream society (McPherson, R., 2018; Adair, 2005; Gagné, 2010; Giroux, 2006; Jones, 2012; Menacker & Kudota, 1971; Milburn et al., 2009; Roxas, 2008).

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Opportunities and Obstacles to Making Innovation a Priority in Education

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Abstract

For many years, the main approach to educational improvement has consisted of high-stakes testing and accountability. While this approach has achieved some success, it has also created negative outcomes including a narrowing of the curriculum, and an over-testing of students. Against this backdrop, there are examples of teachers that have introduced new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This study explores teachers' perceptions of innovative approaches and the supports and obstacles to innovation.

Keywords: *Innovation, Accountability, School Improvement, Collaboration, School Change*

Introduction

For many years, the main approach to educational improvement in the United States, England and Australia has consisted of high stakes testing and accountability. The assumption has been that if high standards are set and measurable goals implemented then student achievement would improve. This approach, which still prevails today, relies on rewards and punishments to incentivize competition between teachers, schools and districts. Rewards include bonuses for teachers and principals and positive recognition for higher test scores, and punishments include designation as a failing school, a loss of funding and the school being taken over by the state (Sheninger & Murray, 2017). In the United States, Federal government policies of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, have played a major role in shaping this agenda. While high stakes testing and accountability have achieved some success, e.g. improved graduation rates in the United States, they have also created many negative outcomes. These include: a narrowing of the curriculum, a focus on low level skills, teaching to the test, an over-testing of students and some schools and districts falsely misrepresenting their numbers (Darling-Hammond, Bae, Cook-Harvey, Lam, Mercer, Podolsky & Stosich, 2016). But against this backdrop, which Couros (2015) describes as a culture of compliance, there are examples of teachers and schools that have introduced new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Through surveying teachers in North Carolina, this study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of innovative approaches in their classrooms, schools and districts, and to understand the supports and obstacles to innovation.

One of the main concerns with high stakes testing and accountability is the negative effects on student learning, specifically the failure to "foster learning and growth or promote curiosity and a drive to succeed" (Brown & Berger, 2014, p. 55). The overreliance on testing encourages rote memorization whereby students forget what they have learned after the test is over. Not only does this waste time and resources, but it also leads to an engagement crisis as students see little value in what they are doing (Sheninger & Murray, 2017). Beyond consideration of students' individual

development are many questions about students' preparation to participate in a changing society and for the world of work. Brown and Berger (2014) state, we need to "ensure that our schools are adequately preparing students for the ever-changing global society in which we live" (p. xix). With new challenges constantly arising, "students must be taught to think critically, they must learn to collaborate with others from around the world to develop solutions to problems and they must learn how to ask the right questions- questions that will challenge old systems and inspire growth" (Couros, 2015, p. 5).

Views on Innovation and Educational Change

We live in a world with rapid changes in technology, new products and new ways of doing business and where innovation is viewed as critical to business success (Sattell, 2017). However, in education, many of our schools and their approaches to teaching and learning have not changed significantly in years and innovation remains largely unexplored. Where innovation is included in discussions of educational change, ideas about innovation reflect larger viewpoints on education. In the chapter, "Organizing for success," Darling Hammond (2010) contrasts two models for school improvement: bureaucratic accountability and professional accountability. The former model, which is the basis of the current high stakes testing and accountability, is a hierarchical system based on enforcing procedures, managing compliance and doing what's right. The latter is knowledge based, recognizes teaching as a profession, supports teachers to do the right thing and values collaboration and the sharing of best practices (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The current approach to school improvement of high stakes testing and accountability has also been critiqued as being part of neo-liberal education, prioritizing market mechanisms of competition and choice (Blakely, 2017). Traditional public schools are viewed as part of the problem, constrained by bureaucracy. Savage (2017) provides a more detailed statement of this view: "public schooling is inefficient, overly unionized, unresponsive to user-demand, lacks accountability, and does not effectively nourish the growth of human capital. Market practices are positioned as 'solutions' to these perceived problems" (p. 153). Innovation from a neo-liberal perspective is viewed as processes or initiatives—charter schools, vouchers and choice—which support market mechanisms and challenge the public school's monopoly.

In the *Global Fourth Way,* Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) illustrate a fourth way of educational change, describing six high performing school systems and schools across the world. They contrast the fourth way of change with three earlier approaches to educational change, comparing their different positions on thirteen factors including purpose of education, the roles of students and teachers and corporate influence. In their model, the second and third ways describe educational change based on markets, choice, performance targets, competitive networks and deprofessionalized teacher associations, many of the characteristics associated with neoliberal education. In the fourth way, rather than teachers delivering a pre-determined curriculum and leadership being viewed as vertical accountability, teachers are instead viewed as engaged in developing curriculum within and across schools and leadership is described as a collective responsibility.

While noting that innovation in education faces a steep uphill climb, Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) state "without continual innovation from within, what chances do schools have not only to survive but also to prosper in a world where student's lives and everyday experiences are undergoing profound transformations?" (p. 26). They describe five characteristics of Global Fourth Way teachers: teach less, learn more; transform your professional association; promote collective autonomy; become a mindful teacher with technology and be a dynamo. In relation to the last characteristic, they state, "teachers are, or should always be, the real dynamos of educational

change" (p. 200). The potential for educators to contribute to change is supported by Baker-Doyle (2017). She states,

> When they are allowed space and support to develop their professional voices, when they are seen as leaders in the relational sense and encouraged to collaborate for change, and when they have the agency to take risks in their learning and work, then their grounded expertise and understanding can support the positive change sought by them and their advocates. (p. 211)

Darling Hammond's view of professional accountability for school improvement and Hargreaves and Shirley's (2012) Global Fourth Way of educational change both see teachers as having a central role in change and innovation. Couros (2015) defines innovation as a way of thinking that creates something new and better. He states that this can either be something totally new such as with invention or it can refer to a change of something that already exists, such as with iteration. In a study of the reasons why teachers introduce innovations into their teaching, Emo (2015) found that the 30 self-identified teacher innovators did so out of a desire to improve students' learning, professional development experiences and to avoid personal boredom. However, innovation has at various points been viewed as synonymous with technology and charter schools (Couros, 2015). The Innovative Schools Network, which supports the establishment and growth of high quality, research-based innovative schools, instead identifies seven areas in which innovation can occur: pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, school design, governance, scheduling and relationships. Although providing a specific definition of innovation is challenging because of its complexity, our work was guided by three main ideas around innovation.

> 1) creating new ways to engage students in self-directed learning based on interests, advocacy and problem solving
> 2) new ways of organizing school, including time, physical design, teacher work and student learning and
> 3) established infrastructure for schools, districts and states to collaborate, develop and share innovative programs and practices.

Our Study

A pilot study was conducted with teachers in Southeastern North Carolina to learn about their involvement with innovation in education. The specific goals of the study were to describe 1) the programs and practices identified by teachers as innovative 2) the process of innovation and 3) teachers' perceptions of the support for and obstacles to innovation. The study asked the following information of the respondents: if they were involved with innovative practices; their understanding of innovation; support by their school and district for innovation; and what obstacles they saw to the creation and sharing of innovative practices. A link to our survey was sent to contacts in the twelve school districts which partner with our college of education. Contacts were asked if they would forward the request to school principals to distribute to teachers. The survey link was also sent to a small number of charter schools in these counties.

In addition to surveying teachers, interviews were conducted with four participants. Sixty-four participants volunteered through the survey to engage in a follow-up conversation. This number was further narrowed down to 23 participants who were involved in self-identified teacher-initiated innovation and four participants were randomly selected from this pool. The participants

were asked a series of questions via phone interviews lasting approximately thirty minutes each. The interviews included many of the same questions from the survey. In addition to providing detailed descriptions of their specific innovations, the interviewees offered insights regarding the process of innovation. The interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were read with the method of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After the data was coded, the transcripts were reread for the purpose of identifying themes. Each theme was then considered in relation to each interviewee's reported experience.

Survey Responses

The 397 teachers who responded to the survey were from seven districts and represented an approximate 22% response rate. Elementary teachers were 40% of responses, high school teachers 34%, middle school teachers 18% and Pre-K 2%. Respondents were asked about their number of years of teaching experience, if they held a master's degree and if they were National Board certified.

In response to whether they were involved in implementing an innovative practice or program in their classroom or school, 43% indicated they were involved and 56.6% said they were not involved. To clarify whether this was an individual teacher or broader initiative, respondents were asked to indicate who was involved in this initiative. Responses included 24% at the individual classroom, 23% at the school level and 14% as a district level initiative. Other levels or groups were also included (See Table 1).

Table 1

Persons Involved in the Initiative (N=113)

Individual classroom	24.2%
School level	22.9%
District level	14.4%
Other	13.7%
Specific content area teachers	10.5%
Across grades	9.8%
Grade level	4.6%

As the study sought to explore what teachers' perceptions were of innovation, the definition of innovation was left open. One hundred and thirteen respondents indicated that they were involved with an innovative program or practice and provided a brief description. Examples included: middle school robotics team; Handwriting without Tears (multi-sensory handwriting instruction for K-5 students); integration of social and emotional learning; creation of STEAM center; basketball poets' program; and flipped classroom. Analysis of the 113 innovative programs or practices identified 52 specific programs and 21 individual teacher initiatives. The remaining 39 responses either provided insufficient information or else their responses overlapped with both categories. Of the 52 programs, STEM or STEAM was mentioned 20 times across schools.

When asked if collaboration is important to creating innovative practices, 91% of respondents agreed it is essential, and only 3.9% of respondents disagreed. Respondents were asked to indicate the significance of the change to teaching and learning. For student learning, 57% reported a significant change, and for teaching, 51% reported a significant change (See Table 2).

Table 2

The Significance of this Innovation to Changes in Teaching and Learning

	Small Change	Moderate Change	Significant Change
Teaching (N=158)	7.6%	41.1%	51.3%
Student Learning (N=155)	8.4%	34.2%	57.4%

Respondents were asked about the source of the innovation, i.e., where the idea for this innovative practice or program originated. The top three sources were district school person (29%), face-to-face colleague (22%) and self (13%). Blogs, books and podcasts; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; online education network; and professional organization (e.g. National Council of Teachers of English) each received about 7% of responses. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest) and Advanced Study (Graduate degree or National Boards) each received about 4% of responses.

In response to the question of whether their *school* is involved in implementing any practices or programs that they would see as being innovative, 42% replied Yes, and 58% said No. The next three questions asked about their school administration's support for innovative classroom practices and programs. As can be seen in Table 3, approximately 74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their administration was supportive of innovation. However, when asked if the school provides money to teachers to develop and implement innovative practices, only 24% agreed or strongly agreed and 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In relation to whether teachers were provided time to develop innovative practices, 33% agreed or strongly agreed and 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 3

School Administration's Role and Innovative Classroom Practices and School Programs

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Supports innovation (N=240)	3.3%	7.1%	15.8%	48.1%	25.7%
Provides money to teachers to develop and implement … (N=241)	14.5%	31.5%	29.9%	21.2%	2.9%
Provides time to teachers to develop	11.7%	23.0%	32.2%	25.5%	7.5%

and implement … (N=239)					

Respondents were asked whether their **s**chool *district* places a priority on innovation for improving schools. Responses included 41% who agreed that their district places a priority on innovation for improving schools with 26% who disagreed (See Table 4). In addition, 31% agreed that their district provides resources (time and/or money) to support innovation with 36% who disagreed.

Table 4

School District's Role on Innovation for Improving Schools

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Places a priority on innovation (N=240)	7.1%	19.5%	32.4%	34.9%	6.2%
Provides resources (money and/or time) (N=238)	9.7%	26.9%	32.8%	28.2%	2.5%

In response to whether their district has systems in place for teachers and administrators to share innovative classroom practices and programs across schools, e.g., web sharing, 41% of respondents agreed and 23% disagreed. In response to whether neighboring school districts collaborate in sharing innovative classroom practices and programs, only 12% of teachers agreed and 40% disagreed. From a list of five factors, respondents were asked to indicate if each acted as a barrier to innovation, and if so, to what degree each acted as a barrier (See Table 5).

Table 5

Barriers to Innovation

	No Barrier	Small Barrier	Moderate Barrier	Significant Barrier
Teacher interest (N=238)	23.5%	41.6%	25.2%	9.7%
School/administration priorities (N=238)	17.7%	34.5%	31.5%	16.4%
District priorities (N=238)	12.6%	32.4%	29.8%	25.2%
State priorities (N=238)	6.7%	19.8%	29.0%	44.5%
Lack of infrastructure to support the sharing of best practices and innovation (N=238)	10.1%	28.2%	29.8%	31.9%

Teacher interest was the smallest number with 34% indicating it was a moderate or significant barrier, and state priorities was the highest number with 73% indicating it was a moderate or significant barrier. A lack of infrastructure to support the sharing of best practices was noted by 62% of respondents as a moderate or significant barrier.

Participant Interviews

Interviews were conducted with four participants, John, Rachel, Nina and Brenda. Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality.

John is an instructional technology specialist at an elementary school in a rural school district where he has taught for two years. He stated that he received several grants to create and implement a program where students grow their own fruits and vegetables indoors using lights and hydroponics. Rachel is a science teacher in her tenth year of teaching. She previously taught science at the middle school level but moved last year to teach biology at a high school in the same district. She described her innovation as project-based learning for a school wide biology program. Nina is a STEM facilitator who has been working at an urban elementary school for the last eight years. She has a total of 33 years of teaching experience. Her innovation relates to her work as a STEM specialist. Brenda is an elementary teacher who currently teaches first grade in a fairly rural school district. She has been teaching for 19 years. Her innovation involved removing the student desks from her classroom to encourage free thinking.

The following six themes were identified from the participant interviews:

1. Importance of risk taking
2. Testing culture promotes fear which limits innovation.
3. Desire to increase student engagement and create authentic learning experiences.
4. Innovation springs from need and reflection.
5. Innovation is an ongoing practice that requires teacher commitment.
6. Networking and collaboration are essential to innovation.

Importance of Risk Taking

Brenda, John and Nina mentioned this theme. Innovation is experimentation and involves risk. Experiments center around uncertainty and they carry the potential to produce varying results, including undesirable ones. Two excerpts are included from the interviews.

John	Part of being innovative is taking chances and taking risks and doing things that are outside of the box. In my position I was free to be innovative, I was encouraged to do that. We learned that when we do tomatoes, we're going to have to do them in a different style of hydroponics. Instead of rails we have to do them in buckets or something.
Nina	Not everything works the same way for every teacher. Teachers are individuals and you have to let them be creative so they can gauge their students. They have to…find the things that work best for them.

Testing Culture Promotes Fear Which Limits Innovation

Brenda, John and Nina mentioned this theme. When school reputation and funding are on the line, fear of failure often outweighs the desire to be innovative. Threatened by loss, whether of job, reputation, or social approval, teachers are more likely to adhere to traditional practice rather than innovate. Three excerpts are included from the interviews.

John	Our whole system needs to change. I mean, innovation is squandered just because of the tests that our students are taking and how high stakes they are. Teachers aren't going to be innovative if they fear for their job in doing so. Part of being innovative is taking chances and taking risks.
Nina	They've got to let the kids test less. Teachers are individuals and you have to let them be creative.
Brenda	I'm happy and relieved that the county allowed us to implement flexible classroom seating. They're very traditional in the way they think and very guarded about their [test] scores. Innovation is not always completely supported.

Desire to Increase Student Engagement and Create Authentic Learning Experience

All four participants mentioned this theme. Teachers are constantly considering ways to improve student learning. However, innovation involves significant changes to create more powerful learning experiences that ignite student curiosity and teacher-student engagement. Such changes are often prompted by the recognition of student boredom with traditional "sit and get" learning approaches. Three excerpts are included.

Rachel	We were challenged with the fact that our school is not doing well in the biology state test, and we wanted to find a way that the kids would be interested in it and do much better because they do need to have that interest and that engagement, versus just coming in and taking notes.
Brenda	And so, I started thinking about what are some other ways I can engage students other than putting a Chromebook in front of them all the time.
Nina	I give them problems to solve, and they're building their inquiry skills. So, we're focused on building those skills instead of just how to take multiple choice tests.

Innovation Springs from Need and Reflection

All four participants mentioned this theme. The feeling that something is not working or could be improved upon stimulates questioning and problem-solving. Discomfort illuminates a need, and if this need is met with the necessary reflection, the situation can give rise to innovation. Three excerpts are included.

Brenda	My test scores were good. And I really…started thinking about the teacher evaluation tool. And on that teacher evaluation tool it constantly asks you, Do you allow your children opportunities to problem solve? And I started thinking to myself, I really don't do that. So, my initiative kind of drew from a need.

John	We're a big agricultural county… Everybody has a garden. So, it's very integral to our county, but I wanted it to be – what's next in farming? Where could it be heading? Our county was ranked last in the state on health outcomes and health risks.
Nina	When you looked at what was starting to happen [in public education], it was like we were killing the joy of learning. We had a lot of low-performing students, the "at-risk" level. And they'd never had a chance to do things I just thought all kids did.

Innovation is an Ongoing Practice that Requires Teacher Commitment

All four participants mentioned this theme. Innovation is deeper and more complex than a mere *good idea* or one-size-fits-all program, no matter how interesting. Innovation is a sustained practice of need-identification, reflection and iteration, inside and outside the classroom. Three excerpts are included.

John	[The #1 obstacle to implementation was] I didn't know anything about it. I had to do a lot of research, watched many YouTube videos. So, I invested a lot of my time to do this.
Brenda	Honestly, I think the first thing that has to change is mindset. And from there you need to start thinking, well, you know, am I in it for the long run or am I in it just for a little while?
Rachel	A big thing is going to be teacher buy-in. And I say that because it's time-consuming. Putting it together, making it geared to the individual students that you have. It's not just you can show up at 7:30 and you can leave at 3:30, and you're done for the day. Like I said, it's taken us weekends and nights.

Networking and Collaboration are Essential to Innovation

All four participants mentioned this theme. Innovation occurs through engagement with other educators either face-to-face or via online mediums. Engagement may involve the sharing of a developed curriculum or an established program, or it may simply provide the spark of an idea that awaits development. While there are some systems in place to support the sharing of innovations, these are mostly sustained by individual teacher commitment. Excerpts are included from all four participants.

Rachel	I actually got a whole unit for project-based learning from one of the teachers in another county. We have not shared this innovation with other teachers at other schools in the district. We have just gone with what we've got here.
Nina	I share ideas, learn, and communicate with STEM colleagues usually through email. Sometimes we'll text or tweet. Some sort of electronic touching of base.
John	We have comments from teachers or the admin of other Facebook pages from other schools and they're commenting on our pictures like, "Wow, that's so awesome! We should do that here!"
Brenda	No, my school/district does not have any systems/networks in place for sharing practices or innovations.

	I have shared this practice/program with other educators. I wrote the article for Medium, and that has been re-published in three other publications.

Discussion

One of the main ideas proposed in the beginning of the paper was that support for innovation provided an alternative approach to school improvement. This is especially important when we consider that school improvement is always tied to student learning outcomes. In this study, 91% of respondents who reported that they were involved with an innovative program or practice stated that it resulted in a moderate to significant improvement in student learning. In terms of the impetus for change, individual teachers were identified as accounting for 24% of innovations. Interviews with the four participants involved in teacher-initiated innovation provided a more detailed understanding of the process of innovation. The six themes that emerged from the interviews overlap with the eight characteristics of an innovator's mindset identified by Couros (2015). The eight factors include: empathetic, problem finders/solvers, risk takers, networked, observant, creators, resilient and reflective. In relation to school and district led initiatives (37%), in the open comments section of the survey, several respondents indicated support for a more grassroots "bottom-up" approach vs. a top-down approach in which a district or school person from outside the classroom introduces an approach they describe as innovative.

The 43% of teachers who indicated being involved with innovation might seem high given that North Carolina has, for a long time, embraced high stakes testing and accountability, a context that Couros (2015) refers to as a culture of compliance. However, it is possible that educators who were involved in innovative practices or programs were more likely to complete the survey and further, as the study did not include a definition of innovative, the number may be overstated.

In comparing the respondents' understandings of innovation to the three ideas of innovation informing this study, creating new ways to engage students in learning was the most frequently referenced. Respondents provided few examples of innovation in relation to teacher roles or to teacher involvement with school level innovation. For the third idea, participants were directly asked whether there was an infrastructure in place to support the sharing of best practices and innovative practices.

In terms of support for innovation from the school and district level, the study provides mixed results. While 74% of respondents agreed that their administration is supportive of innovation, the availability of financial support (24%) and the provision of time (33%) for teachers to develop and implement innovative practices were both much lower. Innovation is not just about the challenge of creating new ideas or practices but, equally significant, how ideas or practices are noticed and shared. In this study, 41% of respondents agreed that their district has systems in place for sharing innovative classroom practices and programs across schools. However, when asked whether neighboring school districts collaborate in sharing innovative classroom practices and programs, only 12% of teachers agreed and 40% disagreed. Burkus (2013) notes, "In most organizations, innovation isn't hampered by a lack of ideas, but rather a lack of noticing the good ideas already there" (p. 1). The lack of support in resources and time for innovation, the minimal collaboration across districts, and the 73% of respondents who indicated that state priorities were moderate or significant barriers to innovation suggest that innovation is not seen as a priority in advancing education in North Carolina.

Despite the prominence of high stakes testing and accountability and the general low priority placed on innovation, the study provides some evidence of teachers and districts willing to take risks in implementing innovative practices and programs. However, to go from pockets of innovation to the creation of a shared culture of innovation requires significant changes in policy (Couros, 2015). Robinson and Aronica (2015) contend that "we need a radical change in how we think and do school—a shift from the old industrial model to one based on entirely different principles and practices" (p. 25).

The passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 has opened options, providing states with greater flexibility in how they define student and school success. Even prior to the passage of ESSA, several states have been working to redesign or create bold new educational policies to implement student-centered approaches to learning (Stosich & Bae, 2018) through membership in the Innovation Lab Network, a working group of the council of Chief State School Officers. While ESSA has opened the door to state creativity and innovation (Weiss & McGuinn, 2016), Ferguson (2018) cautions that "autonomy is valuable only to the extent that you have the capacity and resources to do something productive with it" (p. 72). In other words, the lifting of federal mandates may lead to an easing of high stakes testing and accountability, but the switch to embracing innovative approaches to teaching and learning may still be a long way off. As Fullan (2016) states in the chapter titled, *The Elusive Nature of Whole System Improvement in Education*, "success turns out to depend on changing the culture of schools and their relationship to the infrastructure of policies and regulation" (p. 539).

This study gives some hope that even within a state that has embraced high stakes testing and accountability, there are examples of innovative practices and programs. The primary change required is shifting from a compliance culture, in which the expectations for teacher and student performance are clearly defined, to a more professional culture in which teacher expertise and risk taking are valued. The challenge is whether innovative thinking in and about education can become the norm and not the exception.

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Redefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century
By Kevin Fleming

Kevin J. Fleming (2016). 223 pp, $11.99

Reviewed by Meg Turley, Old Dominion University

R*edefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century* provides a powerful case why the education system needs to stop looking at the one path to success (which generally means college) and start aligning student interests and abilities with their future career. Dr. Kevin Fleming, who among several roles, supports over 40 career and technical educational programs as a Dean of Instruction at Norco College, explores the "one size fits a few" system currently in place. He argues our current education system is designed for college-bound students rather than matching students with careers grounded in relevance to their interests and abilities and the reality of the job market. His approach to identifying issues with the current establishment comes with solutions that might change the way we view pathways to education in society today. This book, written for counselors, teachers, and parents alike, proposes fresh ideas that transitions students away from the "college for all" mentality, and move more toward promoting education that better aligns with the needs of students as well as society. This book ties into Fleming's earlier work with his video "Success in the New Economy", where he explains how students should focus more on applied skills and industry-recognized certification to keep up with the demands of today's economy. This is an issue that has come to the forefront of the education conversation within the career and technical education community, and this book lends credible conversation to the issue.

The primary idea in this book is that college is not for every student, but the college for all mentality is setting up students to attend college with no clear direction while accumulating student loan debt they cannot afford. Fleming uses California as the example for his research because it can be generalized to the population stating "As California goes, so goes the nation."[1] The data for this study was collected between 2001 and 2011 (freshman year through college graduation), and shows 68.7% of freshmen graduated high school on time. In a survey of those students who made up the 31.3% that did not graduate on time, the reasons most often noted were boredom in school or lack of relevance. Pushing these students down the college path gave them little in the way of employability skills, making them less productive members of society. The author uses this data to make his case for implementing more employability skills in high school rather than push "college for all."

Fleming makes a strong claim that of 100 students going through the California school system, 31 will drop out, 42 will go straight to the workforce, and 27 will enroll in college. Of the 27 that enroll in college, only 17 will graduate but 10 of the 17 will be underemployed. While these numbers agree with the Fleming's thesis, his use of only state enrollment data limits the

1. Fleming, Kevin J. 2016. *Redefining the goal: The truth path to career readiness in the 21st century*. Author. 16.

strength of his argument. The data also does not account for career and technical education program completers who could have skills to be employable directly out of high school, which could affect the results of the research. Throughout the book the author discusses additional pathways to graduation to include technical high schools and career and technical programs, but there is no supporting data to help the reader better understand how those programs impact graduation.

Fleming does a great job linking how secondary education can be a catalyst for decreasing the skills gap in the United States by arguing that of all the students that graduate high school, only about 7% complete a 4-year degree. Of those that complete college, few will actually work in the field they studied. This ties into Fleming's thesis that students should be better aligned with career interests rather than leading them on one pathway to college. He does this by emphasizing that schools must not only teach students the basics (reading, writing and arithmetic, known as the 3 Rs) but advocates two more: relevance and reality[2]. Fleming's data showed several students are bored in school and do not feel connected to the curriculum. Making the learning relevant to the student's interests could bridge this gap. The reality is there are only so many jobs in the market and students need to look at the jobs within the economy to help decide what they want to pursue. To make this point, the author states "Being well-educated is not the same as being employable."[3]

The one thing I would have liked to see more of in this book was a discussion about career and technical education programs and how they have potential to ease this college for all mentality. The very jobs the Fleming discusses (plumbing, nursing, etc.) are offered in most high schools through career and technical education curriculum and can provide employability skills for students who are not ready to start their college journey. This information would have strengthened the author's argument and could have been an example of how relevance and reality could be implemented.

This would be a great book for educators, counselors and, parents to better understand how they can help students find the pathway that aligns with their interests and connects to the reality of the job market. It really drives home the point that college is not for everyone and our education system should look for ways to match student ability with potential career pathways. Fleming notes that just because a student doesn't go directly to college doesn't mean they will never go to college. It just means there are opportunities to apply interest and abilities to a career path that will make students employable after high school and beyond.

References

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2. Fleming, Kevin J. 2016. *Redefining the goal: The truth path to career readiness in the 21st century*. Author. 73.

3. Fleming, Kevin J. 2016. *Redefining the goal: The truth path to career readiness in the 21st century*. Author. 75.