# CRITICAL QUESTIONS IN EDUCATION

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** Our thanks to the cadre of scholars who serve as reviewers without whose services the journal could not exist.

# 🏛 *Critical Questions in Education: Volume 12, Issue 2*

The Academy for Educational Studies

June 23, 2021

Colleagues and Friends of the Academy:

As we move into the post pandemic era (fingers crossed), the Academy is once again in conference and symposium mode. We will be in Cleveland in the fall and Charleston, South Carolina, in February. And, there is still time to get that proposal to Steve for the Cleveland gathering as the deadline has been extended to July 12. We hope to see you there!

I have mentioned in previous editorial introductions how serendipitously articles in an issue sometimes "speak one to another." That is certainly the case with Volume 12, Issue 2. The first manuscript takes up what Lucy K. Spence has called "generous reading"—an alternative writing assessment used in professional development for teachers. Following her piece, and directly connected to the value of reading (and writing), Jennifer Logue examines the importance of literature for "unlearning" our colonial past and undoing our colonial practices.

In our third manuscript, Eser Ordem and Omer Gokhan Ulum extend Logue's discussion to the value of critical pedagogy and socio-political issues in language teaching, with the idea that emancipation from power-centric ideas is crucial for both students and teacher…in Turkey specifically and elsewhere generally. Finally, Kevin McCleish presents findings from a quantitative study of several schools that examined the continuing "reinforcement of inequality" that seems to never end. Again, I think you will find these articles speak directly one to another in important and valuable ways.

Happy reading.

PAX,

Eric C. Sheffield, Editor
*Critical Questions in Education*

# *Critical Questions in Education*

Eric C. Sheffield, Managing Editor

# Contents

**Manuscripts**

# *Deconstructing Generous Reading: Revising a Writing Assessment*

*Lucy K. Spence, University of South Carolina*

**Abstract**

*This discourse analysis explored the affordances and constraints of Generous Reading (GR), an alternative writing assessment used in teacher professional development. First, GR is traced through its development in empirical studies. Next, a critical discourse analysis of a GR professional development conversation between three European-American educators is described. A teacher of math and science, a teacher of language arts and social studies and a university researcher discussed an African American girl's math writing. The conversation was excerpted from a larger study of GR. A discourse analysis of this conversation uncovered raciolinguistc ideologies that negatively positioned the student, even as the math teacher began to address new possibilities for instruction. The article concludes with a discussion of culturally sustaining pedagogy used to revise the GR form.*

**Keywords**: *writing; generous reading; language' raciolinguistic ideologies; discourse analysis; math writing; assessment*

This discourse analysis explores the affordances and constraints of Generous Reading, an alternative writing assessment (Spence, 2010) and how it was used with teachers in a racially and ethnically diverse setting in the southeastern US. Because raciolinguistic ideologies (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016). were expressed during the writing assessment conversation, Spence used critical discourse analysis to understand how this ideology was introduced and maintained. This was necessary because raciolinguistic ideologies must be confronted and understood for change to occur. Because diverse student writers have persistently faced discrimination in US education settings, it is important to address the potential for raciolinguistic ideologies surfacing during writing assessment (Ball, 1996; Baugh, 1995; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Escamilla & Coady, 2001, 2005; Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012; Kinloch, 2010).

Deficit notions of varieties of English are persistent in both instruction and assessment (Cazden, 1988; Coady and Escamilla, 2006; Delpit, 2006). It has been shown that varieties of English such as African American Language and writing features typical of English learners unduly influence teachers and others who score student writing (Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012). Negative assumptions about students based on their style of speech impact opportunities for linguistically diverse students. Deficit-based prescriptive practices, a focus on assessment that narrows curriculum, and pre-existing notions of what counts in writing position students as lacking language skills. For educators to resist such practices in writing instruction it is necessary to interrogate teachers' views of linguistically diverse student writing and to understand how cultural and

linguistic diversity can be addressed in teaching and assessment practices (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Recent writing assessment scholarship has explored issues of diversity and what this means in terms of validity (Poe, 2014). For example, analytical rubrics used with diverse student writers fail to address sociocultural aspects of writing such as content, context, culture, and linguistic diversity (Spence, 2010). Teachers depend on their interpretations of the written product and these interpretations may be based on deficit perspectives. Therefore, Soltero-González, Escamilla, & Hopewell (2012) recommend using a holistic bilingual perspective when assessing linguistically diverse student writing. Holistic perspectives are necessary to counter notions of a standard version of English that lead to deficit perspectives toward linguistic diversity (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015). This paper challenges deficit perspectives through a discourse analysis of one writing assessment conversation.

## Background

Generous reading is a form of writing assessment that allows educators to read student writing focusing on the writer and the process of writing (Calkins,1986; Graves,1983, Murray, 1980). Generous reading explores student writing focusing on strength and voice. Among other scholars who have taken this approach, Dyson (2003) traced children's writing and talk to imaginative play, songs, movies, sports teams, and classroom practices, highlighting the dialogic aspect of writing. Other scholars have explored student writing through the lens of literary analysis and descriptive processes. Armstrong (2006) used descriptive and interpretive inquiry to demonstrate how children used purposeful procedures in crafting their texts. Similarly, Carini and Himley (2009) used descriptive review to understand the student as a person and learner. Kaomea (2001) used literary and critical analysis to explore children's written texts about race and ethnicity. Her analysis revealed classroom, school, and community discourses in student writing.

Generous reading builds upon and furthers a line of inquiry that analyzes student writing with the expectation that each piece of writing will contain unique strengths and reflect the sociocultural context of the writer. With this perspective, it is understood that writing is a social practice, and the way students organize their language will be evident in their purpose for writing. As students' participation in social practices change, their writing will also change (Street, 2012).

Generous reading was developed in a largely Spanish dominant US community. The aim was to encourage teachers to acknowledge student voices and literary strengths (Spence, 2006). Generous reading has since been used in other contexts, with students of diverse linguistic backgrounds including Chinese bilingual writers and African American writers (Spence, 2010). Generous reading involves two analytical tools, heteroglossia and literary elements. Bakhtin's (1986) notion of heteroglossia is used to notice the voices in a written composition. Voices of parents, school, popular culture, home languages, cultural practices, current events, child culture, among other voices, can be found in student writing. Additionally, literary theory including analysis of metaphor (Lakoff, 1992) is used. Figurative language, repetition, binary opposites and telling details uncover the linguistic strengths that children internalize through hearing and reading language every day. Generous reading recognizes these literary elements as a natural part of language acquisition. A form was developed for noting the voices of others and figurative language in student writing (table 1), below.

*Table 1: Figurative Language in Student Writing*

**GR**

| Student | Date | Grade | Teacher |
|---|---|---|---|
| Genre | Process stage | Title | |
| **Voices of Others** | | **Figurative/Descriptive Language** | |

What does this tell you about the person?

What does this tell you about the writer?

What does this reveal about the writing?

What is the student doing especially well that I want to reinforce?

What can I teach that will help the student grow as a person or as a writer?

What can I teach that will help improve this piece or future writing?

*Student notes: English learner (level), AAE Dialect, Gender.*

This paper concerns a segment of conversation during a professional development study using generous reading. In the larger study, five teachers learned to use generous reading to analyze their students' writing. The current discourse analysis explores how the author and two teachers approached the math writing of an African American fifth grade girl, Shamika. All names in this paper are pseudonyms.

**Raciolinguistic Ideologies**

Raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) help explain a deficit view of language variation that persists in education. Such ideologies entail superseding the students' home language with a standardized version of language valued by educators. In practice, the white speaker/listener marks certain language characteristics of racialized people, while leaving the language of other groups unmarked. "That is, raciolinguistic ideologies produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects." (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150).

Notions of language superiority and inferiority exist within political and educational systems. These multifaceted contexts include dominant French settings in Canada, France, and other countries, dominant English and bilingual educational settings within the US, and a variety of language groups in majority white, Latinx, or African American classrooms and schools (Briceño, Rodriguez-Mojica, & Muñoz-Muñoz, 2018; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Flores, Lewis, & Phuong, 2018; Lo, Park, & Vigouroux, 2017; Low, Sarkar & Winer, 2009).

Raciolinguistics aptly describes prevalent attitudes toward African American Language in the United States. In some contexts, African American speakers are regarded as speakers of standardized English, while their linguistic and academic needs are neglected (Sung, 2018). In other contexts, African American Language (AAL) is singled out by teachers and parents for correction (Martinez, 2017). Yet linguists have shown that AAL is rule governed and systematic, not slang, lazy or haphazard (Hudley and Mallinson, 2011; Lanehart, 2015; Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 1977). Linguists have shown that AAL is a language, not a dialect. AAL follows a system of grammar rules that is stable across African American language communities, although regional variations occur. AAL is also rich in meaning and is an important part of American history and culture. The question of how best to serve students of African descent has been explored through culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced educators to culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which focuses on developing students academically while supporting their cultural and critical competence. Culturally relevant pedagogy involves notions of capability, relationships, and critique as the core of teaching that supports marginalized students. CRP involves teaching for academic excellence by challenging students to reach their highest potential. It involves teaching cultural competence, by first focusing on the students' own culture then generating an understanding the cultures of others. CRP also involves teaching sociopolitical consciousness. Students learn to question issues of power and class, with a goal of liberation (Boutte, 2015). Adding to CRP scholarship, Geneva Gay (2002) developed the concept of culturally responsive teaching, "defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (106). Building on this body of work, Paris (2012) argued for doing more than responding to students' cultures, but that pedagogy should sustain them. Culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (95).

These pedagogies build upon and sustain what students bring with them to school through valuing and appreciating the richness inherent in language variation (Hudley and Mallinson, 2011). Within writing instruction, exploring language variation with students can be an enriching experience for both teacher and students, as they analyze texts to illuminate the diversity of human expression. Students can investigate language, using metacognition to understand their own discourse and the discourse of others. Students write within various sociocultural contexts and can navigate between these discourse communities while developing the literacies and rhetorical conventions needed for academic success (Ball, 1996). Research on culturally responsive pedagogy shows that academic achievement improves when teaching is filtered through students' own cultural experiences (Gay, 2018). Although CRT has progressed over two decades, additional CRT research is needed to unpack teaching practices that promote student access, equity, and empowerment in a variety of K-12 settings (Thomas & Berry, 2018). The current study addresses this

need through a critical discourse analysis of a conversation among fifth grade teachers and a university researcher within a majority African American school in the southeastern United States.

## Methodology

### Context

This discourse analysis is an excerpt of conversation from a larger study of a professional development with five teachers using GR to assess student writing. The two teachers in this conversation were between the ages of 33-55 and had between 13 and 19 years of teaching experience. They taught fifth grade in an elementary school with a large African American population (55%) in the southeastern US. The study group conversations were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed qualitatively. The present study is based on a conversation about one student's math writing. The participants in the conversation were European American, and the student they were discussing was an African American girl. One teacher taught language arts and social studies. Another teacher was the designated gifted and talented teacher for math and science. She agreed to take part in the professional development to explore the integration of writing within math and science instruction. Spence facilitated the study group conversation.

### Discourse Analysis Method

Critical discourse analysis attempts to draw intersections between the form that language takes and the functions it is used to accomplish (Rogers, 2004). In this critical discourse analysis, internal relations including hedges, repetitions, idioms, topic changes (Fairclough, 2003), and binary oppositions (Derrida & Caputo, 1997) were found within the conversation. Then, external relations were analyzed to determine how language was used to refer to social events and other texts. External relations included self-identifying and 'othering.' 'Othering' refers to casting a group or individual as intrinsically different from oneself.

The analysis focused on transcribed audio recording of the professional development session in which Shamika's math writing was discussed. This included 78 conversational turns. The transcript was first coded for internal relations. Then, using the coded transcript, external relations such as social identities, and relationships between people were determined. Spence facilitated the generous reading conversation, therefore additional perspectives from outsiders to the conversation were consulted. Critical colleagues reviewed the transcribed conversation and preliminary findings, providing their perspectives on the roles of the conversation participants. After this consultation, the coded transcripts were reviewed, and analytical memos were written to describe Jean, Amy, and Spence's roles in the conversation. The coded transcripts of internal relations were used to excerpt the conversational turns that illustrated the participant roles. Deconstruction of binary oppositions was ongoing throughout each phase of the analysis.

## Findings

Critical discourse analysis revealed the ways in which the conversation participants took stances in solidarity with one another, Shamika, and generous reading. It also revealed resistance to generous reading and to Shamika. As the participants constructed their arguments and adjusted their stance throughout the conversation, implicit raciolinguistic ideologies encroached upon generous reading.

Spence opened the conversation with information on linguistic diversity that addressed Spanish speaking students and African American Language. This was followed by a generous reading conversation about Shamika's math writing. Spence attempted to empathize with Jean's role as math gifted and talented teacher.

*8  Spence: Yeah, so that makes sense that you don't have any of that in your classroom.*

This move by Spence quickly "othered" linguistically diverse students through the impersonal pronoun, "that." Jean followed in the same manner with the phrase, "children that are." Jean created a binary opposition with "kids who are slightly above grade level to gifted" and "children that are..." Although Jean left it unsaid, she implicitly referred to linguistically diverse students.

*9 Jean: I don't teach children that are…I teach the kids who are slightly above grade level to gifted. I really don't deal a lot with improper grammar. This is the one I was pulling my hair out.*

Jean's view of linguistic diversity was described through the phrase, "improper grammar." This marked Shamika's writing as lacking. Jean referenced her frustration with Shamika's writing with the metaphor, "pulling my hair out" then continued to reveal her view of linguistic diversity.

*10 Jean: She circled her important words in the question to make sure she was getting it, right? And then she put, equivalent fraction. And this is common for her dialect, putting the S at the end…Equivalent fraction are. See that's a dialect issue right there.*

Jean became frustrated because Shamika used a feature sometimes found in African American language; the generalized plural S absence. The absence of plural S occurs with relatively low frequency in AAL (Rickford, 1999); therefore, it is unclear if this was a feature of AAL or was due to some other factor such as hasty handwriting.

As the generous reading facilitator, Spence's language was directive, although with hedges, for example when Jean noticed repeated phrases in the writing, Spence softened her directive with modal verbs saying, "you might", "she's almost" and "you can put."

*16 Spence: So you might want to write the repetition, so she's almost relying on that. I mean that's a strength of hers that she knows, so she's got to get those words in there and she repeats them. And then down here you can put that you noticed the dialect with the dropping of the S. Down here.*

The use of directives with hedges revealed Spence's role of moving the teachers toward generous reading while indicating this was a shared aim among the three educators. However, Jean ignores the attempt to see repetition of math vocabulary as a strength, instead describing Shamika's language as deficient.

*17 Jean: Dialect. Yeah, dropping of the S.  She's good with that.  Or adding the S where it doesn't belong.*
*In proper English please. Repeat to me.*
*I can't do that Mrs. B.*

*You will do that. If you are going to college in the future. You will speak to me in proper English.*

Jean implies that a conversation took place between her and Shamika at some time in the past. The reported conversation portrays the teacher and student misunderstanding one another. Jean seems to know that Shamika is not metacognitively aware of absent plural markers in her speech. She requests something that Shamika cannot do; produce standardized English on demand. Jean positions herself as responsible for Shamika's future and positions Shamika as incapable of taking advantage of the opportunity Jean is providing. Spence did not address this negative positioning of Shamika, but following Amy's lead, once again tried to divert the conversation to Shamika's appropriate use of math vocabulary.

*18 Amy: She uses odd and even.*

*19 Spence: Okay, she uses odd and even up here as adjectives. So, I haven't seen anybody else do that.  So that stood out to me.*

Amy and Spence established a pattern of redirecting the conversation to writing strengths, while ignoring deficit discourse. Binary oppositions revealed underlying notions about what was acceptable to the teachers. "Dropping the S and adding the S; "college" in opposition to uneducated; "proper" in opposition to vulgar (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). These oppositions uncovered the raciolinguistic ideologies within the generous reading conversation.

The conversation continued to position Shamika negatively. As a math teacher, Jean valued the correct answer to the given math problem. For her, the purpose of writing was to assess the students' understanding of the concept. In the excerpt below, Jean positions Shamika as deceitful because she uses the vocabulary but does not understand the concept. Jean and Amy see Shamika's language ability as a cover for not understanding the math concept.

*24 Amy: Her concept is off.*

*25 Jean: Her concept is off.*

*26 Spence: So I would say something like, experiments with mathematical language to explain. (laughter)*

*27 Jean: I would say here, experiments, would have to say, yeah.*

*28 Amy: I think it's really great, but I hate to say that sometimes when we don't know the answer, we try to BS our way out.  Like I said, I think this is excellent that she tried, she put out words, she used her numbers, she's got pictorial representation. She did what was asked of her with the knowledge that she had, albeit, it's a little…*

*29 Jean: Right. I mean, she did. She did all that was asked of her. Okay, I guess when I was looking at it, I was like…*

> *30 Spence: And you know what I would say, she has the voice of the test. Isn't this a test taking strategy?*

Facilitator is consistent in her role, prodding the teachers to see Shamika's vocabulary in a positive light, "mathematical language to explain." Although Amy moves between expressing solidarity with Spence, "I think it's really great" and deficit discourse, "but I hate to say that sometimes when we don't know the answer, we try to BS our way out." Amy continues to vacillate between solidarity with Spence, who insists on finding strengths, and Jean, who wants to see the correct math concept.

A few lines later in the conversation, Jean agrees with Amy's negative assessment of Shamika then Amy suddenly asserts her solidarity with Shamika. Spence again ignores the deficit discourse and instead redirects the conversation toward analyzing Shamika's writing process.

> *34 Jean: She has a future of being a good BSer.*

> *35 Amy: Yeah. But you know, I have a love for those girls.*

> *36 Spence: If you think about this part right here. Where did she get this? Did she get it from you, the classroom?*

By deconstructing Jean's "future of being a good BSer" we find the opposite of her earlier statement, "if you are going to college in the future." Within a raciolinguistic ideology, Shamika is cast as deficient, although she demonstrates good writing by using appropriate mathematical vocabulary such as "odd and even" and "denominator." Amy hedges her agreement with Jean and voices solidarity with Shamika, "yeah, but I have a love for those girls." Leaving unsaid, which girls she is referring to and grouping Shamika with other girls who might not be trusted. Spence ignored the teachers' deficit discourse and was therefore complicit in continuing an unjust practice of assigning negative traits to students based on their race, skin color, and language.

Discourse analysis clarified the need to disrupt raciolinguistics and other unjust practices within writing assessment. The conversation participants were not aware of their raciolinguistic ideology. Instead, Jean's language indicates frustration over the absence of the plural S, and her perceived responsibility for Shamika's academic future. Jean insisted that Shamika produce "proper" English in preparation for college. As Jean adopted the role of monoglot college preparatory teacher, she found it difficult to move past Shamika's misunderstanding of adding fractions with unlike denominators. Amy revealed a raciolinguistic ideology through assigning a negative trait to Shamika and othering "those girls" positioning all of them as untrustworthy even though she professed, "I have a love for those girls." Facilitator's focus on generous reading was meant to shift the conversation away from deficit language, yet the teachers returned to it regardless. Generous reading alone was not productive in revising deficit beliefs and did not disrupt raciolinuistic ideology.

In a later interview, Jean remarked that finding writing and math strengths was challenging and a completely new way of assessing math writing. Yet Jean persevered with generous reading. Despite the deficit perspectives in the conversation, ultimately generous reading seemed to be helpful to Jean in reflecting on how she used math writing to assess Shamika's understanding of fractions.

*70 Jean: I would sit down and talk with her. First of all, I did this about a week ago…So, I could sit down with her and say, okay, let's look at what you wrote. And what do we know about equivalent fractions. Just have a talk with her. And talk about equivalent fractions. Maybe give her an example, let her solve one, talk her way through it. And then I would ask her, I want you to look at what you did. How would you change what you wrote?*

Jean reflected on an instructional conversation she had with Shamika, "I did this about a week ago," while also pondering how she would use the insights from generous reading in a hypothetical conversation, "I could sit down with her and say" This illustrates that reflecting on teaching was one of the benefits of generous reading because Jean had to think about how the analysis of student writing could be used to move the student forward as a writer or as a person. It is important to consider the whole person rather than only the writing because writing is always about some topic that arises from the person's interactions in the world. In this case, Jean reflected on what she learned about Shamika as a math student through her writing. Jean also realized she was helping Shamika develop as a writer.

*78 Jean: Oh revision, yeah, okay revision. Okay. So that's what I did for her.*

Jean realized that an instructional conversation using math writing could help Shamika revise her math concepts, while also teaching revision of writing. This allows transfer of writing skills used in language arts for writing used in math.

A critical discourse analysis of this generous reading conversation revealed Jean as a monoglot college preparatory teacher, but one who opened her mind to the possibilities of writing and in particular to Shamika as a writer. Jean's colleague, Amy expressed solidarity with generous reading and with Jean's monoglot perspective on linguistic diversity. Spence directed Jean and Amy's understanding of generous reading as a method for analyzing math writing, yet completely missed several opportunities to disrupt deficit discourse and to position language as a strength useful for instruction. The three participants together portrayed Shamika negatively despite her writing strengths. The following discussion will explore possibilities for eliminating raciolinguistic ideologies from writing assessment, particularly from generous reading.

## Discussion

Decades of research have revealed discrimination toward African American Language in student writing (Ball, 1996; Baugh,, 1995; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012; Kinloch, 2010). However, much work remains for critical reflection of unquestioned and stereotypical messages in our society. This on-going work requires bringing implicit attitudes to explicit awareness and is a recursive cycle that can lead to liberation from such attitudes (Harro, 2000). This is personal work that must be discovered by educating oneself and interacting with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Educators and researchers have contributed to this work through pre-service teaching experiences, professional development, and research studies.

Generous reading as a form of writing assessment was designed to encourage teachers toward an asset-based analysis of student writing and was developed in a Spanish-dominant com-

munity. The current study focused on an African American student's writing and revealed racio-linguistic ideologies among the generous reading participants. This problem is addressed through a discussion of culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy for African American student writers.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a resources approach to instruction that was developed for culturally diverse student populations. Core concepts include focusing on academic success, maintaining students' cultural integrity, and developing sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Several studies are informative for considering these concepts in relation to writing instruction. Ball (1996) suggested incorporating students' language-preferred text design patterns into instruction. These were used as bridges to academic-based text design patterns. This practice can be used to focus on academic writing success while maintaining students' cultural integrity. Tatum and Gue (2012) described African American males writing about complex issues within a collaborative context honoring student voices. This developed their socio-political consciousness. In other studies, educators emphasized elements of their students' heritages, languages or interests, using non-traditional texts including texts with culturally diverse authors. Teachers have used such texts to engender discussions that decenter standardized English and critique culture and power (Woodard, Vaughan, & Machado, 2017).

Given positive results of culturally sustaining pedagogy for motivating African American students to think critically and write for meaningful purposes, it follows that culturally sustaining pedagogy should be incorporated into generous reading. This would allow teachers to identify raciolinguistic ideologies that are detrimental to students' writing progress. In rethinking the generous reading form used with teachers in professional development, alterations were made based on findings from the critical discourse analysis. The first alteration was to remove the space provided for demographic information (table 1). Although used for research purposes, it sent the wrong message to teachers assessing student writing. "Student notes: English learner (level), AAE Dialect, Gender." This space for notes on the form has been removed so that it does not promote any preconceptions about student language. In the generous reading conversation, Jean referred to dialect, possibly influenced by this section of the generous reading form. It was time to remove this and simplify the form that had been developed in 2010.

The next alteration involved six questions included on the 2010 generous reading form. These questions were revised to provide space for discussing the ideologies teachers bring to their analysis of student writing. The 2010 questions follow:

After finding voices of others and literary elements in this piece of writing:

1. What does this tell you about the person?
2. What does this tell you about the writer?
3. What does this reveal about the writing?
4. What is the student doing especially well that I want to reinforce?
5. What can I teach that will help the student grow as a person or as a writer?
6. What can I teach that will help improve this piece or future writing?

As observed through using the generous reading form over several years, questions 2 and 3 were often conflated by teachers and question 6 was often answered when teachers discussed question 5, so these were combined. Drawing from culturally sustaining pedagogy, a question was added to encourage reflection on implicit understandings of language and writing. "How will I value this

students' language and culture with a focus on academic success?" Although this question is challenging and will be different for each student writer, it is intended to generate new pedagogies that will liberate teachers from unproductive and discouraging assessments of student writing. The new questions on the revised generous reading form now read as follows:

After finding voices of others and literary elements in this piece of writing:

1. What does this tell you about the person?
2. What does this tell you about the writer's process or this piece of writing?
3. What is the student doing especially well that I want to reinforce?
4. What can I teach that will help the student grow as a person or as a writer?
5. How will I value this students' language and culture with a focus on academic success?

## Conclusion

Discourse analysis of a writing assessment conversation revealed raciolinguistic ideology that was perpetuated through a lack of reflection on preexisting prejudice toward African American Language. This unjustly positioned an African American girl as incapable of speaking standardized English and as dishonest in her writing. In fact, the writing included only one orthographic issue, absent plural S, that might have been AAL, but also might have been inadvertently omitted in the process of handwriting. The teachers agreed on Shamika's writing and math strengths, even while positioning her as incapable of standardized English and as dishonest in her writing. As a result of these findings, the generous reading form was revised to include a question derived from culturally relevant pedagogy (table 2), below. Teachers are now asked to consider how they might value each students' language and culture while focusing on academic success. Future studies using the revised generous reading form will potentially lead to culturally sustaining pedagogies for the writing development of linguistically diverse students.

*Table 2: Generous Reading Form (Revised)*

| Student Name | Date |
|---|---|
| **Title** | |
| **Voices of Others** | **Literary Elements** |
| After finding voices of others and literary elements in this piece of writing: | |
| **What does this tell you about the person?** | |
| **What does this tell you about the writer's process or this piece of writing?** | |
| **What is the student doing especially well that I want to reinforce?** | |

| |
|---|
| **What can I teach that will help the student grow as a person or as a writer?** |
| **How will I honor this students' language and culture with a focus on academic success?** |

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# (Un)Learning Through Narrative Fiction:
## Toward a Psychoanalytically Informed Anticolonial Education

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*It is now urgent*
*To dare to know oneself,*
*To dare to confess to oneself what one is,*
*To dare to ask oneself what one wants to be.*
–Suzanne Césaire

*All that can save you now is your confrontation with your*
*own history; it is not your past, but your present.*
—James Baldwin

## Abstract

*In this paper I call for an emotional confrontation with our traumatic, racist, and often unacknowledged history. I share ideas, experiences, and pedagogical strategies with which to engage difficult dialogue about difficult knowledge, in such a way as to disarm defense and, potentially inspire anti-racist activism in education and beyond. The first strategy is to develop psychoanalytic sensibilities in education. I argue that this will help us begin to invite the "freedom to feel" into classrooms that customarily prioritize freedom of thought. The second strategy is to insist that a confrontation with traumatic elements of untold history, and unacknowledged racial (and other) injustices in our current reality, will be uncomfortable. I emphasize that we must work on our capacity to tolerate discomfort and develop our capacities to mourn (loss of cherished belief, loss of innocence, loss of privilege, among other forms of loss). Third, I argue that "knowing ignorance" can be a powerful antidote to the structural ignorance that has hindered our capacities to think critically and creatively in solidarity with different others. I conclude by suggesting that engagement with narrative fiction in film and literature, is a promising pedagogical approach that enables transformative dialogue to take place. I share a few of my favorite films and short stories that have yielded fruitful conversations in my own social justice-oriented classrooms.*

*Keywords:* anticolonial education; psychoanalysis; ignorance; acknowledging traumatic histories; unlearning through narrative fiction

**I**n celebration of Juneteenth 2020, *The New Yorker* featured a page turning article, "The History That James Baldwin Wanted America to See."[1] In it, author Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. writes, "[f]or Baldwin, the past had always been bent in the service of a lie," and he asks: "Could a true story be told?"[2] Glaude reports on how both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Baldwin continued the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, who had dedicated his lifework to confronting and dismantling historical distortions about black folk, and white America alike. Dubois demonstrated that "black people have been kept in oppression and deprivation by a poisonous fog of lies that depicted them as inferior, born deficient, and deservedly doomed to servitude to the grave."[3] In a February 1968 speech dedicated to Dubois, Dr. King orated, "White America, drenched with lies about Negroes, has lived too long in a fog of ignorance."[4] Months later, reflecting on the dangerous and tragic road that led to King's execution in Memphis, Baldwin questioned whether the country would have the courage to confront its demons. "Could America tell itself the truth about how it had arrived at this moment? And did it have the moral stamina to surrender the comfort of its lies?"[5] Baldwin argued that new laws, gestures of sympathy, and acts of racial charity would never suffice to change the course of the country. Something more radical had to be done; a different history had to be told. In this paper, I invite educators to think about how we might heed Baldwin's call.

As we navigate a new pandemic that has compounded and exposed our older one, the grave structural racial injustices the country has yet to address, and as we traverse the rise of the alt-right here, and around the globe, now more than ever, we must seek to better understand the ways in which too many people have ignored how our white supremacist past permeates our present.[6] We must better understand the past, so we can better navigate our present, and imagine a future free of state sanctioned violence, profit logic destruction, devastation, oppression. Now more than ever we must ask: How does what we learn about the past shape how we see (and don't see) the present, and dream of a future? How might we begin to finally reckon with how the violence of our colonial past has been erased from mainstream history, only to repeat itself in new and seemingly more destructive ways in our present? How should we teach about the horrors of history, the history we'd rather forget (and seems largely to have been forgotten), one that repeats, seemingly never ends, one which we can never fully comprehend?

Because the perspectives, accomplishments, and accounts of oppressed peoples who were (and continue to be) treated with (unjustifiable) (state backed and intimate) violence are often marginalized in mainstream history, and the official national narrative, the stories many have been told, and continue to tell, about who we are, and how we got here, are often quite skewed.[7] Dominant discourses of American exceptionalism, professed democratic ideals of life, liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness foreclose possibilities for a collective confrontation with the traumatic elements of our history. In this "whitewashing" of our national narrative,

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1. Cited in Glaude, Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-history-that-james-baldwin-wanted-america-to-see#intcid=recommendations_the-new-yorker-homepage_11f81167-e88c-4ad0-a449-8a3d5b0eb805_popular4-1

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Dr. King delivered the Centennial Address, "Honoring Dr. Dubois" at Carnegie Hall in New York City on February 23, 1968, the one hundredth anniversary of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois's birth. Available at: https://www.crmvet.org/info/68mlkweb.htm

5. Glaude, 2020.

6. Covid 19 and the public execution of George Floyd shine a light on structural and racialized inequalities that have never been adequately addressed.

7. Much has been written about this matter. See in particular: Baldwin, J. *Baldwin Collected Essays.* Ed. Morrison, T. (New York: Library of America) 1998; Loewen, J. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong.* (The New Press, 1995).

American historians effectively excluded black Americans ''from the national story'' and ''denied blacks access to the institutional means of changing the narrative.''[8] This "racial erasure," past and present, imposes a structural ignorance rendering us (differently) complicit in the repetition of race based state violence, and misrecognition of the damaging ways in which it impacts each and every one of us.[9]

The problem of addressing what we know and don't know about ourselves and our histories is complex. We must learn to navigate elements of structural, as well as subjective, forms of ignorance. Not only do we need to address the gaps and lapses in official narratives, but we must also reckon with ways in which resisting and defending against difficult knowledge is part of what it means to be a member of the human condition.[10] Challenging cherished belief, grappling with new knowledge that questions or clashes with one's world view, unlearning history, rethinking national identity, is tricky business indeed.[11] Yet, in education generally speaking, and in teacher education in particular, we have yet to fully grapple with what knowledge and ignorance do to (and for) us, particularly the difficult knowledge of "social catastrophe, evidence of woeful disregard, experiences of social violence, illness, and death."[12] How might teacher educators (and educators in general) extend a compelling invitation to unlearn distorted versions of history and rethink a national identity that many have come to prize with passion and pride? How can students, and teachers alike, think critically about our official national narratives of equality and meritocracy when so much of who they think they are is invested in them?

In what follows, I call for an emotional confrontation with our traumatic history, not just a rational assessment of it. I share ideas, experiences, and pedagogical strategies with which to engage difficult dialogue about difficult knowledge, in such a way as to disarm defense (in so far as that is possible) and, potentially, (hopefully) inspire anti-racist activism. Though I do have teacher education as a central focus, I suggest that these strategies can be adapted and incorporated into almost any curriculum. The first is that we engage with key insight from psychoanalytic theory to address the affect involved in learning and thinking, with emphasis on the human (all too human) propensity to defend against difficult knowledge. We must learn not only to encourage and recognize freedom of thought, but we must also begin to invite the "freedom to feel" into our classrooms.[13] The second is an insistence that a confrontation with traumatic elements of untold history, and our current reality, will be uncomfortable. I emphasize that we must work on our capacity to tolerate discomfort, and develop our capacities to mourn (loss of cherished belief, loss of innocence, loss of privilege, among other forms of loss). Third, I argue that "knowing ignorance" can be a powerful antidote to the structural ignorance that has hindered our capacities to think critically and creatively in solidarity with different others. I conclude by suggesting that including "poetic knowledge," igniting the literary imagination, through engagement with narrative fiction in film and literature, is a promising approach that enables transformative dialogue to take place. I share a few of my favorite films and short stories that have yielded fruitful conversations in my own social justice oriented classrooms.

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8. Woods, A. "The Work Before Us: Whiteness and the Psychoanalytic Institute," Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society Vol. 25: 2, 2020, 234.

9. Charles Mills, "White Ignorance" in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (State University of New York Press, 2007), 11–38.

10. Deborah Britzman, "Teacher Education in the Confusion of Our Times" in *Journal of Teacher Education, 51:3, 2000.*

11. Megan Boler, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education.* (Routledge, 1999).

12. Britzman, *2000.*

13. Arthur Jersild, *When Teachers Face Themselves.* (Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1955).

## Freedom to Feel: On Developing Psychoanalytic Sensibilities in Education

Psychoanalysis teaches us that individuals and cultures alike develop their character and values based largely on how they respond to the traumas of their history. Further, it sees emotional life as our most significant resource for learning to think, and in learning to think differently. [14] Psychoanalysis has always been concerned with the ways in which perception is passionate, and defends against difficult knowledge. By incorporating psychoanalytic sensibilities to difficult dialogue on divisive issues like the global pandemic, ongoing systemic racism, we can invite examination of our own unacknowledged attachments and defensive refusals to know or think differently. We can learn to analyze the affect involved in falling into the all too familiar trap of belief confirmation. We can improve our capacities for participating in genuine dialogue as impetus for collaborative investigation toward personal and social transformation. And yet, psychoanalytic discourse remains relatively marginalized in educational theory and practice.

One notable exception to the defensive refusal to engage psychoanalytic theory in teacher education is Arthur Jersild's groundbreaking work, *When Teachers Face Themselves.* Jersild brings to light the emotional life of teachers, and explores their defenses against it.[15] In talking to hundreds of teachers about their work and lives, Jersild discovered that teachers had secret emotional lives that pained and perplexed them, and that they largely endured these troubling affects alone in silence. He found that anxiety, loneliness, hostility, and desire, were central to the emotional world of teachers, as were numerous ways in which defenses were mobilized against them. Remarkably, however, he also discovered that when prompted, teachers seemed eager to share the innermost feelings they struggled to keep at bay. "If people could encourage one another to come out from behind the curtain that commonly conceals their emotions from others and from themselves," he wrote, "these emotions might be faced in an insight-producing way."[16] He emphasized that "much of what is called thinking is governed by undisclosed feelings. Logic is often ruled by fear or anger."[17] We need, he argued, to be able to recognize how feeling influences thought if the intellect is be able to function freely.

And yet, the majority of schooling and academic life centers the notion of freedom of thought. Jersild shows that what is more important is the need to nurture the freedom to feel, the courage to face emotions such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, and hostility that are central in the lives of teachers and students (and all members of our human condition). He urged that our affective lives need to become a central focus of teacher education programs, so that we can stop dangerously defending against them. The defense against negative affect can take many forms, such as projecting it onto others, viewing it as pathology rather than an everyday reality, flying off the handle too easily, or being unable to take criticism, to name but a select few. When defenses are unleashed in classrooms, learning shuts down, and the impetus to investigation becomes thwarted. Defenses are designed to help us transform unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and insights into something more tolerable. It is important to note, however, that while they may be life enhancing strategies, they can also have devasting and destructive consequences. When we invite students to reflect on particularly touchy and taboo topics such as systemic racial injustice, state violence, systemic and subjective forms of ignorance, we should expect defense and resistance, and learn how to work through it.

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14. Wilfred Bion, "A Psychoanalytic Study of Thinking," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis; 43 (1962), 306-310.*
15. Jersild, 1955.
16. Jersild, 85.
17. Ibid., 86.

Engaging students in teacher education classes in discussion about the emotional world of learning is a productive way to begin any semester. Making the human capacity to deploy defenses against discomfort part of a class conversation from the outset can help to prevent them from becoming aggressively strengthened. I have found that chapter two of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* leads to fruitful dialogue about the ways in which each of us defends against anxiety inducing feelings and ideas. "Life, as we find it," Freud writes, "is too hard for us; in order to bear it, we cannot dispense with palliative measures."[18] He names three such strategies: "powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it."[19] In my experience, students become enthusiastic in the attempt to provide examples of each of these defensive tactics that they themselves may have engaged in, those they have seen in others, and the strategies that are encouraged and reinforced in our culture more generally. They have addressed topics ranging from how some parents are unable to see the flaws in, or the struggles of, their children, and vice versa, alcoholism, addiction to social media as strategy with which to avoid intimacy, and the magical thinking in Trump's logic that limiting testing will reduce the cases of Covid 19.  We have discussed how our consumerist society has us defending against aging, feeling sad, our mortality, and pretty much anything and everything that makes us uneasy or uncomfortable.

If we learn to acknowledge and tolerate anxiety and discomfort, we can learn to not weaponize it, so that we can better navigate it, which frees up new energies for thinking, and frees up our creative capacities. Discussions of the different mechanisms of defense, such as rationalization, idealization, projection, denial, disavowal, identification with the aggressor, and others, can provide a powerful entry point into dialogue about the ways in which we all protect ourselves from affect and insight that threaten our sense of self, our cherished beliefs, our world views.[20] Students can be invited to think of examples of each that they have witnessed on cultural and subjective levels through the encounter with characters in novels, film, and the cultural imaginary.[21] Analysis of the consequences of different defenses produces not only new insight, but new ways of approaching dialogue, new ways of seeing and being in the world. We can study the ways in which some defenses are adaptive and productive strategies to living well while others exert a heavy cost on the subject or culture as the case may be. I find this approach an excellent primer to confronting the uncomfortable topics of our traumatic history, ongoing institutional racism, distortions in the official national narrative of American identity.

As we invite students into a "pedagogy of discomfort," it is important to acknowledge the ways in which both teachers and students constantly seek ways to allow or impede the emergence of unfamiliar thoughts.[22] For many of us it can feel next to impossible to think thoughts critical of a beloved partner, parent, or fatherland. "The force of reason does not easily unbind the energy of passionate attachment."[23] If teachers invite analysis of affect, and our desire to defend against it, into the room, we can help our students recognize how a person's thinking can

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18. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey (The Hogarth Press, 1975), 13.

19. Ibid.

20. Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (Karnac Books, 1995). For an excellent account of short stories that portray particular defenses see: Sandra Buechler, *Understanding and Treating Patients in Psychoanalysis: Lessons From Literature. (Routledge, 2015).* For an excellent analysis of ways in which the South defended against the fundamental contradiction involved in owning persons, see Volney Gay, *On the Pleasures of Owning Persons: The Hidden Face of American Slavery.* (International Psychoanalytic Books, 2016).

21. For an incredible list of films that portray different defenses see https://psychmovies.com/

22. Boler.

23. Ibid.

be undone by anxiety, frustration, hate or love.[24] We can help our students stay with an impetus for investigation, stay in the desire to know, to learn, to grow. We must traverse carefully so as not to undo the movement to knowing by igniting the desire to ignore. I suggest that students may be less inclined to repudiate difficult knowledge when this all too human tendency is engaged collectively at the outset.   As outlined in this section, the quite practical approach of fostering dialogue with students at the beginning of every semester about the emotional life of learning can help to cultivate curiosity and a willingness to sit in discomfort. Assigning students a free write on all the emotions they feel in learning can be a good start. Teaching about the notion of defense is another excellent way to begin the conversation.

Some practical classroom strategies with which to facilitate discussion on the importance of working through defense could include a screening of the 2019 film, "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood." The film is a dramatization of Fred Rogers' (played by Tom Hanks) conviction that children, and people in general, can and must learn how to talk about and deal with emotions. Specifically, it is based on a true story of the formation of a friendship between Mr. Roger's and a journalist (Tom Junod, given the pseudonym Lloyd Vogel in the film; played by Mathew Rhys) who has been unable to work through his emotions regarding his mother's death, and his fury at his estranged father for abandoning the family during that trying time. The film was inspired by Junod's 1998 Esquire cover story "Can You Say…  Hero?" Vogel is put on assignment to profile Mr. Rogers, which he finds a demeaning task at first. The film does a wonderful job depicting the journalist as defensive, angry, and aggressive until he meets Fred, who, without being obvious about what he is doing, teaches him how to process and work through his rigid defenses. How does this happen? Through witnessing the television show, where Roger's teaches kids how to acknowledge and address bad affect, and, even more importantly, through continued and ongoing collaborative dialogue between the two men.

By the end of the film, Vogel has transformed into an open, loving, son, father, and husband. My favorite line in the film is, "Anything mentionable is manageable." A wonderful line to repeat to students in classrooms centered on difficult dialogue. Rogers says this to the journalist's family as they are at the bedside of his dying father, actively avoiding a conversation about death. Roger's personifies Freud's conviction that people avoid things that are painful, and that they often do so at their peril. The price people pay for rigid defense, and the gains to be had in working through them, was brilliantly portrayed through the transformation character of the journalist. The conversation Rogers' begins about the fear of death, and our desire to avoid facing it, and about how talking about it helps us process painful affect, couldn't be more timely. We could use this as a jumping off point into whether students think our society renders talk about death and dying taboo, or whether it was a mere character flaw in Vogel and his family members. We could invite classroom discussion about whether anti-maskers might be acting out of a legitimate fear of death. Screening this film to facilitate dialogue about the emotional worlds of students can lead to powerful and lively discussion about the perils of failing to acknowledge and analyze bad affect. It powerfully depicts how talking about things we don't like talking about has transformative impact on people's lives, as well as the worlds we inhabit. Simply asking the students to free write, and then pair share, about any of the following prompts: how did you feel when you watched the film? What motivated the characters to do X? What motivated the screen play? The director? What associations did you make?  Do you know people similar to any of the characters in the film? Did they change or remain the same? can be the beginning of a wonderfully transformative classroom experience.

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24. Ibid.

The short story, "The Years of My Birth" by Louise Erdich is another powerful depiction of the damage defending against unpleasant emotions can do to people and relationships. The destructive defenses of failing to admit and process loss are beautifully represented by the different characters in the story. It is the story of a white girl, Linda, who's been abandoned at birth because of a slight deformity.  Her twin brother had cramped her up in utero so that her skull was misshapen, her feet and legs twisted and contorted. Her brother, on the other hand was picture perfect—outwardly at least. Their mother rejects Linda at once, leaving the doctors to determine her fate. The Ojibwe nurse who had assisted in the labor, secretly cares for the lonely infant, who has been left alone with a feeding tube while the doctors figure out at which institution they should place her. Each night the nurse holds, feeds, and cuddles the baby, massaging her head, working to stretch out her legs. After not long, she brings the child home and raises her as one of her own, on the reservation. 5 decades later, after her Native parents have passed, Linda receives a phone call from her birth mother, whose only reason for reaching out, though she doesn't share this at first, is that she needs a kidney for her son, the protagonist's twin brother, Linden, who will surely die without a transplant. Linda is surprised to find that she can't help but contemplate doing so, and soon enough, she finds herself taking the test to find out if she is a match. Why would she do this?

Knowing the story of her abandonment, the person performing the test tells her that her twin did not value his own life (in much the way they had devalued hers), and had tried to suicide with alcohol and pills. Linda is urged not to donate her kidney, which is indeed a match. In thinking about why Linden would not want to live, Linda surmises that their mother, who could not acknowledge the guilt she felt in having abandoned her own life that proved worthy of love, must have taken it out on her chosen one. Linda decides to pay him a visit. He is miserable and exceedingly cruel to Linda, confirming her conviction that despite appearances, he did not live a good life. "Before we were born," reflects the protagonist, "my twin had had the compassion to crush me, to improve me by deforming me: I was the one who was spared." Linda had been loved and had grown into a beautiful person—on the inside at least. Which is more important? The story is short, and rich with much more racial and cultural nuance than here depicted, but note that there is much to be unpacked about what it is like to live with loss, particularly when unacknowledged. Unpacking the emotional and cultural lives of each of the characters with students is a promising approach to bringing the phenomenon of defense and the importance of working through negative affect to the forefront of a class that will deal with the thorny issues of institutional racism, a pandemic that should be much better contained, and other pressing social and global problems that inspire intense emotional response.

There are many ways to begin these difficult dialogues; one final powerful example of a discussion starter about destructive defensiveness could begin by screening an episode from the new series, "In My Skin," streaming on Hulu. The show can perform a similar platform through which to analyze the defenses people deploy to avoid painful realities, or to prevent others from seeing or knowing fundamental aspects about themselves. But defense often comes with a cost. One cannot experience intimacy when one hides oneself from others. One cannot experience the joys of connection, of sharing, of being known. The protagonist of this coming of age story has a mother who is mentally ill, and an alcoholic emotionally stunted, absent father. Quite a lot for anyone to grapple with, let alone a teenager navigating high school. Part of the protagonist's coping mechanism is to present a false picture of her family life to her friends and teachers. In so doing, however, she is unable to tap into her creative capacities, unable to form deep connections with her friends, and she winds up setting herself up for humiliation and alienation. How would her experience of the world be different if she talked about her struggles with friends and

teachers? One could ask students. How did you feel when watching? What associations did you make? What do you think motivated the writers and the characters? Such depictions of defense, and the destructiveness of bottled up emotional worlds, can lead to an excellent entry point to having these important discussions early in a semester, before even beginning to engage students in affective (un)learning about our traumatic and white-washed histories.

### Working Through: On Developing the Capacity to Mourn

Freud believed that the aim of psychoanalysis was the freedom to come to new understandings about what we've been through, to *feel* it fully, to *mourn* the tragic events in our lives, and to move forward with all the knowledge, wisdom and courage that facing the truth entails. And yet, our cultural norms have it so that when we discover that life brings suffering, capitalism offers us a product, a service, or a drug to help us forget the suffering, avoid it, resist it, deny it. Aging, fear, sadness, loss? American capitalism offers a hypnotic treatment. And as a result, too many of us experience discomfort – a contradictory idea, a hostile remark, a gender difference, a cultural norm or political opinion different than our own—as a trauma that must be removed at all costs.[25] Sandra Buechler shows that as a culture, we are suffering from the loss of sadness—our culture pathologies normal sorrow while our lives are characterized by loss. [26] How do we live loss and why do we, culturally speaking, refuse to grapple with it, and what are the consequences?

*The Inability to Mourn* by German Psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich[27] explored the psychic defenses against guilt, shame, and remorse of Germans in the aftermath of Nazi atrocities. The authors write that "all levels of society, and especially those in positions of leadership—industrialists, judges, university professors—had given the regime their decisive and enthusiastic support; yet, with its failure they regarded themselves as automatically absolved from any personal responsibility."[28] A central theme of the book is the project of "working through": remembering horrifying events and one's own participation in them, confronting horrifying events, and one's own ambivalent relation to Hitler, emerging with greater openness to reality, detaching oneself from repetitive denial and avoidance of our common humanity, our common capacity for suffering. The authors write of mourning as the psychic process by which we learn to cope with a loss, or a nation with a catastrophe in its history. This working through, they emphasize, is simultaneously an intellectual and emotional process. Learning to live well with our traumatic histories requires that we do not forget the past, but rather we must mourn those aspects of it which we would rather not confront.

While it took the Germans a few generations after the Mitscherlich's first conducted their research to begin to make reparations for the wrongdoing in their past, they have done a better job at confronting the evils of their history than have Americans, argues Susan Neiman. I tend to agree and think we might learn from the Germans, as Neiman suggests in her new work,

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25. Steven Reisner, "Mourn and Mobilize: Radical Psychoanalysis Confronts the Climate Emergency" Season 1, Episode 5 of *Madness: The Podcast,* Feb. 9, 2020.

26. See Sandra Beuchler, *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Problems in Living: Addressing Life's Challenges in Clinical Practice* (Routledge, 2019).

27. Cited in Drekmeier, M. "Review: *The Inability to Mourn" in Cosscurrents* 26:3, 1976, 328.

28. Drekmeier, 329.

*Learning From The Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil.*[29] American culture prefers narratives of progress, victory, and happy endings, Neiman suggests.[30] Lost with this tendency, however, is the ability to express emotions that are fundamental to our humanity. We lose the capacity to tolerate discomfort, to grieve, to mourn; rather than learn how to process bad affect. When bad affects aren't processed, we learn defense, which can then become rigid and aggressive resistances to learning, to feeling, to living well with history and ourselves. Neiman argues that many American students know more about the evils of the Holocaust than they do about the evils of the slave trade, which occurred for over 400 years; many students here can point to how evil the Holocaust was but neglect to register the brutal racial terror of reconstruction, which extends into our present in numerous ways. Neiman suggests that the focus on the evils of the Holocaust is a form of displacement for what we don't want to know about our own crimes. If the Germans learned to mourn their traumatic history, so can we. As the world seems to be crumbling around us in the face of a global pandemic and massive civil unrest, now more than ever we must learn to process loss so that we can work through it constructively.[31]

Aside from permitting ourselves awareness of the impact of the loss, when allow ourselves to feel sad, we become more aware of the potential these experiences have for furthering growth and development. Rather than fixating on the (often unexamined) pursuit of happiness, we might come to see sadness as an emotion that potentially binds us together. Buechler argues that sadness eventually cleanses, allowing us to return to the fray. It acquaints us more nearly with all it means to be a human being, binds us to each other, and sharpens our appreciation of joyous moments. It lends perspective to the ordinary and the extraordinary vicissitudes of life. We need to learn to develop a strong tolerance for sadness and loss, for they will always be close at hand. "In navigating an ongoing relationship to loss, sadness is doing its essential job, of binding me more firmly to life."[32] We need to keep this in mind as we invite students to confront a past they do not wish to learn about. We need to keep sadness and loss in mind as we invite students to examine their own complicity in injustice as it plays out in our present.

Losing—things, loved ones, cherished belief—is ubiquitous, unavoidable, and incredibly difficult; it is particularly important to develop the capacity to mourn loss in the processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning our traumatic histories. Elizabeth Bishop's short poem "One Art" can be a beautiful opening into conversation about what it means to develop the art of losing. How do we process the loss of those things which we cherish deeply, along with the trail of other objects, investments, and attachments on life's journey? Bishop reminds us that life is full of losing. She writes, "so many things seems filled with intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster."[33] In order to process losses that do feel like disaster, she admonishes us to lose something every day: keys, an hour of time, our way to different places. That way, Bishop seems to say, we are better prepared to deal with dashed dreams, and the loss of loved ones. The short story "Grief" by Scholastique Mukasonga is a compelling look at how difficult but important grieving and mourning can be.[34] Assigning Bishop's poem, Mukasonga's story, and the film "Ordinary Peo-

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29. Susan Neiman, *Learning From The Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2019.

30. Ibid., 35.

31. Stacy Otto's work on the educative value of mourning is instructive here, see in particular, "A Garden from Ashes: The Post-9/11 Manhattan City-Shrine, the Triangle Fire Memorial March, and the Educative Value of Mourning." *Journal of Social History*, Volume 47: 3, 2014, 573–592.

32. Buechler

33. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47536/one-art

34 .https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/22/grief

ple," which is a fascinating portrayal of a family navigating the loss of a son/brother, could provide means for a really important class discussion on the importance of feeling sad, of mourning loss. Life makes us practice losing all the time; though, we too seldom acknowledge this in education; I have not experienced collaborative dialogue about loss in my own educational history, in professional development workshops, nor department or university wide events. Given all that we have currently lost as a result of the pandemic, it seems such dialogue is long overdue. When it comes to teaching divisive topics, or calling for a confrontation with our traumatic history, a focus on the shared humanity of having to navigate loss can help to disarm defense, and create a sense of community in classrooms.

Inviting students to read and discuss Bishop's short poem is an excellent practical approach to collectively acknowledging and sharing about the inevitability and importance of dealing with loss in a classroom. Students will often share stories of how they deal with losing keys, phones, their homework assignment, romantic partners, and what strategies do and don't work for them. This practice can be augmented by also screening the film "Ordinary People," an excellent way to complement the dialogue on Bishop's poem. Talking with the class about the different approaches each family member in the film takes towards acknowledging and working through grief (and in the case of one of them, disavowing it entirely) is another powerful and practical way to guide a discussion with students on the importance of developing the capacity to mourn. Spoiler alert: The mother in the film is incapable of mourning, which hardens her and limits her capacities to live fully. She becomes incapable of loving her son, and eventually her husband. She loses them both. She is unable (perhaps unwilling, too afraid?) to feel sad, to reckon with the tragic loss of her first son, but in her incapacity to mourn, she loses all the joy and love in her life as a result. Students who screen the film gain a powerful image of the difficulty in ordinary people can have with grieving, in feeling sad, and being vulnerable to troubling affect. To facilitate discussion, educators can invite students to free write about their experience viewing the film. How did it make them feel? What associations did they have? What motivated the characters? Did it resonate with experiences they had in real life? What in life, besides loved ones, do we need to mourn and why? Engaging in anonymous freewriting can free students up from fear of being mistaken, but indulge in a practice of free thinking and feeling. There are many opportunities to learn from anonymous free writes, such as collecting and randomly redistributing and having other students read and share what they've read. Engaging and important dialogue emerges, which creates a sense of community, and helps prepare students for the loss that the emotionally charged learning and unlearning about the traumatic histories we have yet to be formally taught in mainstream education entails.

## On Knowing Ignorance: Narrative Fiction as Fuel for Transformative Dialogue

Andrew Bennet's concept of "knowing ignorance" is another important intervention against defensive, rigid habits of thinking.[35] "Knowing ignorance" according to Bennet, is the cultivation of a literary imagination to invite the embrace and exploration of the condition by which we are all beset, namely, the state of ultimately *not* knowing.[36] Part of what it means to be human is to grapple with ignorance: What is the meaning of life? How did we get here, and where are we going? Too often we forget that it is questions that drive historical inquiry, and

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35. Andrew Bennet, "Literary Ignorance" in *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies*, eds. Matthais Gross and Linsey McGoey (Routledge, 2015).

36. Ibid., 38.

that what we feel certain of today will change tomorrow. Bennet's concept of "knowing ignorance" is a call to approach texts, and life, with our ignorance in mind. Ignorance cannot be eliminated, but it can be directed towards new ways of reading, thinking, and being in the world. One helpful way to (re)discover our capacities to tolerate ambiguity and cultivate curiosity might be to heed Bennet's call to step into the literary imagination and linger in what poet John Keats calls "negative capability," the "capacity for remaining in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact, logic, and reason."[37] We need to learn to dwell in a state of openness to all experience, and identify with the inspirational power of beauty, which is, according to Keats, much more important than the quest for objective fact.

What we learn from Bennet is that we need to unlearn desire for certainty and cultivate a disposition of curiosity—aspects of the human condition stymied by mainstream k-12 education, enamored as it has become with the cult of efficiency, accountability, measurement, and productivity. In an attempt to show us what we need to unlearn in order to adopt a stance of knowing ignorance, Blanchot suggests that what most threatens reading is the person who thinks they know in general how to read. It is a reader's stubborn insistence upon remaining themselves in the face of what they read that gets in the way.[38] Blanchot argues that reading demands more ignorance than knowledge; it requires knowledge endowed with an immense ignorance. One of the key attributes of a good reader, for Blanchot, is forgetfulness. I think what he means by this is a willingness to leave behind, to let go of what one thinks one knows, to lose what one has learned when one approaches a new text, a new form, or any Other. Learning new ways of knowing, and challenging entrenched habits of thought, might help students become more vigilant in their studies, helping them become more independent, creative thinkers, who are able to better grapple with forms of knowledge that are difficult and challenging. "Knowing ignorance" is an important strategy as we try and repair a misremembered history and relinquish dreams of mastery, superiority, and invulnerability.

I have found that students become more engaged in transformative dialogue about notoriously touchy and divisive topics through stimulation of the literary imagination, and the supplementing of my curriculum with poems, short stories, and film. Characters in fiction can be an excellent template for analysis and assessment of the predicaments people have found and continue to find themselves in. Mainstream history books fail to capture the intricate dynamics of unreliable narration, defense mechanisms, the dialectics of knowledge and ignorance, the lived realities of violent oppression and fierce resistance against it. Teachers and students alike can be invited to explore and interpret the lives, defenses, conflicts, and circumstances they encounter in fiction to explore the past more fully. As Richard Hoggart wrote back in 1970, "literature may help to keep open our sense of the richness of human experience, the virtually inexhaustible meanings in each gesture and word spoken, if they are understood in their contexts."[39] Compellingly, he argued that not only can literary imagination help to show expressive phenomena are not only symptomatic of the consciousness of their age but themselves help to alter that consciousness."[40]

Poetry and fiction invite critical reflection on what it means to be a member of the human condition, what it means to be caught in the contradiction between wanting to know and not wanting to know. We get an intimate portrayal of how minds work. How (unacknowledged)

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37. Cited in Bennet, 39.
38. Cited in Bennet, 40.
39. Richard Hoggart, "The Literary Imagination and the Sociological Imagination." Available at: http://ressources-socius.info/index.php/reeditions/18-reeditions-d-articles/229-the-literary-imagination-and-the-sociological-imagination
40. Ibid.

affect determines action and thought. The interplay between knowledge and ignorance, the precariousness of privilege, the innovative and ongoing forms of resistance to oppression are revealed in narrative fiction in ways traditional educational texts fail to encapsulate.  Stories in film and literature can provide us with a comforting distance from which to be on the look-out for defensiveness, bias, blind spots, active forgetting, willful and structural ignorance, rather than leaving them dangerously dormant, misrecognized as matters of fact, masquerading as masterful and mastered objective knowledge. It can help us in the development of capacities for reckoning with loss and an ability to mourn—capacities required as we encounter and work through difficult knowledge. Short stories and film, in particular are tremendously well suited to the social justice oriented teacher education classroom as they can be read alongside a more theoretical chapter and well digested within a week, stimulating a more complex reflexivity on a host of challenging issues that are raised in the main text.

One of my favorite poets, a revolutionary activist in the decolonization struggles of Martinique, and around the globe, Aimé Césaire, went so far as to argue that "poetry is the only way to achieve the kind of knowledge we need to move beyond the world's crises"[41] In his most systematic statement on the revolutionary nature of poetry, he wrote that "science affords a view of the world, but a summary and superficial view"[42] and that "side by side with this half-starved scientific knowledge there is another kind of knowledge. A fulfilling knowledge."[43] And yet, we seem to side-step and discount such knowledge in mainstream traditional educational settings. R.G. Kelley shows that Césaire strove to demonstrate that what presides over the poem is not the most lucid intelligence, the sharpest sensibility or the subtlest feelings, but experience as a whole. One of his most profound and impactful works, the historical prose poem against the realities of colonialism, *Discourse on Colonialism* summons up powerful unconscious forces, a powerful source of knowledge and revolt.[44] This work makes a powerful addition for any teacher who wants to invite students to more fully human encounter with the realities of our colonial past. *Discourse* sets out to prove that the colonial mission to "civilize" the so-called primitive is just a smoke screen. Césaire demonstrates that it decivilizes the colonizer, and results in the massive destruction of entire societies—societies that not only functioned at a high level of sophistication and complexity, but that might have offered the West valuable lessons about how we might live better together, and remake the world.  Mainstream history does not encourage students to think about the perils of white privilege, about what has been lost in the colonial encounter. Césaire's portrait of what is lost for both colonizer and colonized is rich, poetic, and a multidimensional accounting of our past that has the potential to move students out of comfortable ways of understanding the past as including victims and the victorious. In Césaire's poem, the suffering of all is brought to the fore, inviting reflection on how we might reimagine the past to better grapple with the present and imagine our future.

In an anonymous free write on their reaction to his text, one of my students wrote, "after finishing the text, I realized the in-depth trance that Césaire's writing brings about. I found myself feeling the arguments and descriptions Césaire was providing." We paired this reading with Suzanne Césaire's poem in the epigraph to this paper, which enabled a most fruitful dialogue about manifest destiny, civilization, and who holds knowledge and ignorance in history. The Césaires were heavily involved in the surrealist movement, which helped to inform and inspire decolonial

41. Robin Kelly, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism" *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine. November, 1999. Avaialable at: https://monthlyreview.org/1999/11/01/a-poetics-of-anticolonialism/*

42. Cited in Robin Kelly, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination. (Beacon Press, 2002) ,9.*

43. Cited in ed. Melissa Kwansy, *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry. (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 232.*

44. Aimé Césaire, A., *Discourse on Colonialism.* Trans Joan trans. Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000).

struggles around the world. Suzanne Césaire wrote of surrealism,  "far from contradicting, diluting, or diverting our revolutionary attitude toward life, surrealism strengthens it. It nourishes an impatient strength within us, endlessly reinforcing the massive army of refusals. And I am also thinking of tomorrow."[45] Students shared that they had not been introduced to the surrealist movement, nor such an imaginative stance towards rethinking our past, present, and future.

Other key couplings that have generated fruitful discussion where power, privilege, knowledge, and ignorance are interrogated in new ways include the pairing of Mills' "White Ignorance" with Orwell's, "Shooting an Elephant." Challenging simplistic notions of the ways in which power operates, who creates and belongs to the "British" tradition, Orwell's protagonist brings to light the structural white ignorance that Mills articulates, and demonstrates the destructiveness and precariousness of white privilege—on the privileged himself. When I have tried to teach about what Mills' notion of white ignorance in the past, it seemed to fall flat. Students felt accused and didn't really engage. Orwells' story, however, depicts a character struggling with emotion with which we are all familiar. Desire to conform, to appear in control, in the know. The character acts against his own instincts to avoid looking like a fool. How many times has each of us done this and why? It is surprising how open students become, and more willing to examine the perils of white privilege on each of our shared humanity. Excerpts Alicia Elliot's *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* paired with chapters on native American History from Loewen's *Lies my Teacher Told Me* yielded fruitful acknowledgement of the humanity and resilience of first nations peoples. Students shared they want to read more of Elliott, who shares her experience of being ashamed by the food pyramid we teach our students, because her family couldn't afford to eat that way. She suffered shame and humiliation by a practice my students admitted they had previously taken for granted.

Too few white Americans have been forced to face just how violent, just how hideous and awful slavery was, just how brutal was the Jim Crow south.  Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man" and Richard Wright's "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" compel us to grapple with it. These stories are not an easy read but they did foster an eye-opening class discussion on the intersections of race and sexuality, how these have been constructed violently, and have been so violently eroticized. Wright and Baldwin again reveal how privilege can distort the privileged themselves. The first few times I taught these stories I was open about my worries that I might traumatize students. They shared that they had a hard time with them, but found the perspectives new and powerful and difficult. A secret ballot vote with commentary revealed that the entire class felt I should teach these stories again.  There is a powerful, and powerfully traumatic scene in the 2013 film "12 Years A Slave" of a hardened, terrifying white slave owner attempting to separate a family and auction them off to different owners. If we examine this man's emotional life, we can see that he too is suffering a trauma, certainly not in the same way or to the same degree as those whom he terrorizes. But does he look happy? Is he able to live to his fullest capacities to experience love, joy, beauty? What does he lose in this violent equation? Just as the emotional worlds and psychic lives of characters in fiction come to life in ways that tradtional textbooks and theories occlude, so, too, do students engaged in discussion about them. In my experience the use of short stories and film has enabled more engagement with the traumas of our histories we have yet to work through collectively. As psychoanalysis has revealed, change happens through sustained and collaborative dialogue about our emotional lives that we often are too afraid to speak about. Narrative fiction can help us to break through the cultural taboos on discussing race, sex, and death, and show us what is lost when we are afraid to say what we feel and how what we

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45. Suzanne Césaire *The Great Camouflage ed. Daniel Maxim (Wesleyan University Press, 2012).*

have experienced shapes how we feel the world. We can come to learn to think and see differently when we begin to confront our traumatic histories collectively. We can uncover the self-investment of all sides privileged/oppressed divides when we begin to talk about how these dynamics are lived and suffered in silence too often. This approach has the potential to inspire personal and social transformation, and hopefully anti-racist activism in education and beyond.

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# *Critical Pedagogy and Socio-Political Issues in Language Teaching: Views from Turkey*

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**Abstract**

*Post-method era has been hailed in second language teaching, although a few practitioners have been able to use the tenets of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy aims to raise socio-political issues to emancipate both teachers and learners from power-centric ideas. The practical use of critical pedagogy has been the participatory approach that intends to discuss socio-political topics on the agenda. This study aimed to investigate the views of Second Language (ESL) instructors (N=20) teaching English in a preparatory school of foreign languages regarding the use of participatory approach. The study was qualitative and descriptive in nature. This study used two data collection tools composed of a list of topics and a semi-structured interview form. The results show that the participants hardly used the participatory approach and barely negotiated socio-political issues in classroom settings since they thought that these topics could be risky to discuss in the socio-political context of Turkey. However, almost all of them ideally believed that this approach should be applied in English language education.*

*Keywords:* critical pedagogy; socio-political issues; participatory approach; transformation

## Introduction

Power and power relations are not epiphenomenal, secondary or by-product of humanities (Newman, 2001). Rather, power is a central issue in critical pedagogy and related disciplines that entail developing a critical perspective towards a political or social movement, an idea, ideological and hegemonic practices (Newman, 2001). Critical pedagogy in language teaching holds radical ideas and concepts that aim to emancipate individuals from traditional and dogmatic thinking by criticizing power relations and political issues in education (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1998; Storey, 2015). Although various teaching approaches and methods that have been fruitful in many ways in that they have produced pivotal implications abound in language teaching, the methods in post-method era have been hardly used in this discipline. The history of these methods and approaches dates back to 1950s and 1960s when post-structuralism arose in sociology and philosophy (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Thornbury, 2013). Thus, critical pedagogy has a strong theoretical background in humanities. However, language teaching has long ignored its tenets and applications in classroom settings, although some progress has been experienced in recent years. One of the threats to the use of critical pedagogy has been neoliberalism that can be defined as a set of practices that minimize the power and effect of the state and maximize the power and autonomy of individuals that

are often conceptualized as entrepreneurs and those who responsible for their own choices in the market (Braverman, 1974; Block & Gray, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Mirowski, 2013). Therefore, neoliberalism uses all kinds of tools to find room to commodify any entity in language teaching as well by showing itself as a default or conventional system and discourse that entails decoding and deconstruction. Thus, it can be said that the rise of neoliberalism in 1980s has also, to some extent, prevented the use of critical pedagogy in second language education (Giroux, 1981, 1984; Philipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

One of the specific methods developed as result of discussions in the context of critical pedagogy is participatory approach which recommends that political and social issues need to be discussed in second language education (Auerbach, 1995, 2001;Berlin, 2005; Freire, 2000) Since textbooks and curricula frame and manipulate minds of learners, teachers and administrators in line with the tenets of neoliberalism, the use of participatory approach have been often discarded in classroom environment in particular. Thus, learners are taught topics that they hardly negotiate when they visit other countries, especially inner circle countries such as European countries, the USA, Canada and the others.

**Critical Pedagogy in Language Teaching**

Critical pedagogy in language teaching aims to centralize real life problems that agents of learning and teaching experience to act as active subjects inside and outside schools and classroom settings. Since textbooks and in-classroom activities deal with artificial and repetitive tasks, it is important to prioritize real life problems that are negotiated by individuals in the society (Pennycook, 1990; Sharma & Phyak, 2017; Thornbury, 2013). Life situations, development of critical thinking, dialogical process, learners' power of decision making and discussion of topics on the agenda are core elements of critical pedagogy in language teaching as well (Berlin, 2005; Khatib & Miri, 2016). Dominance of topics congruent with the tenets of neoliberalism is visibly seen in curricula of language teaching programs and textbooks because any socio-political issue that defies the principles of neoliberalism and these dominant cultures is deliberately concealed so as not to awaken teachers and learners (Holborow, 2015; Shin & Park, 2016). However, those in power in the government and schools agree to make an agreement with textbook publishers for the sake of so-called democracy and so-called progressive education through popular culture and populist discourses (Pennycook, 2018). Therefore, in the terrain of language teaching, critical pedagogy gains critical importance in that it can lead teachers and students to reflect upon what is given to them and what is pre-determined for them because they are seen as a priori subjects that need to follow a certain path while learning a second language. Agents of teaching and learning are silenced and expected not to object to what is given to them because the west has already established and prepared discourses and texts for non-western communities, which can be regarded as an orientalist perspective (Said, 1978). This is where critical pedagogy can be used to decolonize and deconstruct orientalist and hegemonic discourses in language teaching because Freirean pedagogy which is deeply rooted in its sociopolitical context has always been emancipatory (Au, 2017). This liberatory paradigm supports two basic elements, dialogue and problem-posing (Freire, 2000). Dialogue provides an opportunity for individuals to actively reflect upon reality and the status of their knowledge on a social level because individuals are social in nature, and dialogue is firmly established and grounded in sociality which opens up possibilities for social action, social change and social dialogue through active reflection (Freire, 2000). Another element in critical pedagogy is problematizing social-political issues that surround individuals and asking questions about issues on the agenda that take place outside schools as well. Thus, posing a problem is developing a

critical perspective towards conventional discourses (Freire, 2000). Thus, problematization of these discourses, daily experiences, pre-determined curricula and anodyne topics can lead individuals to think of what kind of action they might take for a social change in and outside their immediate context (Apple, 2011; Au, 2017; Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 1988).

In critical pedagogy, teachers are seen as transformative intellectuals that negotiate the hidden curriculum with students by focusing on issues such as democracy, justice, freedom, equality and equity (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988) Thus, a dialectic relationship between teachers and learners is established because topics (not) covered in the curriculum shaped by those in power are constantly negotiated and reflected upon (Au, 2017; Giroux, 1988). Active participation of teacher-student and student-teacher is reinforced. Economic, social, political and cultural reproduction is critically discussed because schools are seen as places where ideology, domination, economic capital and hegemony exist (Au, 2017). Therefore, culture itself is also challenged because it can be no longer construed as an innocent entity. Rather, schools impose ideologies of certain cultures on students, which always remain to be deconstructed through social dialogue in a dialogic and dialectic relation. This kind of Freirean schooling understanding empowers students' conception of cultural power because teachers allow students' their own experiences to reified, which also provides a great opportunity for agents of schools to comprehend their strengths and weaknesses (Freire, 2000). Teachers and students establish a social dialogue horizontally on equal status by naming the problem in the world with collaboration (Au, 2017; Falzon, 2006). As a result of these dialogic efforts, social change is aimed. Reflection and action are strictly connected to each other in critical pedagogy. To emphasize this issue, Freire (2000) uses praxis that refers to simultaneous occurrence of reflection and action. In this sense, critical pedagogy denotes handling social and political problems inside and outside schools to create transformation in immediate and broader contexts. Since individuals are in nature social beings in critical pedagogy, social dialogue and dialectic relation become two indispensable elements of this model (Falzon, 2006; Freire, 2000). If students and teachers collaborate equally and actively negotiate meaning for social change in this system, then an order of specific discourse imposed by those in power as hegemonic or ideological apparatus is deconstructed, disrupted and challenged (Fairclough, 1992). By doing so, all kinds of oppression and domination are challenged and objected to so that individuals can be emancipated from ideologies and hegemony imposed on them through curricula and syllabi in schools that serve purpose of those in power that tend to exert repressive essentialism.

### Participatory/Freirean Approach in Language Teaching

Critical pedagogy has ended in practical application in second language education as well in recent decades. It is called either participatory or Freirean so that learners can also situate themselves in a social context with their teachers in an emancipatory manner and so that both can name a topic or an issue for themselves instead of others' imposition on them. Thus, participatory approach can be regarded as applied version of critical pedagogy and critical theory because participation of learners and teachers is appreciated and motivated (Frye, 1999; Motlhaka & Wadesango, 2014). It is important to contextualize second language teaching classrooms by involving learners in each process of learning on a social and political level (Berlin, 2005). They are supposed to participate in each procedure and step of language education ranging from curriculum to in-classroom activities. Topics, themes and issues are selected and negotiated together in order for learners to be and feel empowered, which enables them to seek their legal rights and take precautions or action in case they may encounter a social, administrative or political problem in schools (Bartlett, 2005). The main aims of participatory approach are to bring socio-political issues on the agenda

into classroom settings (Jackson, 2007). Since each individual is assumed to be social and political and is understood within the framework of social justice and class, topics to be discussed in second language classrooms need to be chosen from real life events because political and social events that cannot be ignored affect both countries and individuals. Teachers and administrators should take risks to discuss political issues that could help all participants of teaching and learning emancipate themselves from ideological apparatus and oppression. Topics such as immigration, wars, trafficking, violence against women, child labor, LGBT/queer issues, animal rights, unemployment, global warming, capitalism, neoliberalism and drug addiction always engage our lives and minds. However, it is often clear that once teachers and learners step into classrooms, topics are changed into popular culture and anodyne issues owing to the design of the curriculum in accordance with the framework and desires of neoliberalism.

This study aims to unravel the views of English instructors in Turkey about socio-political issues on the agenda at national and international level. It is important to raise immediate issues experienced outside classrooms because negotiation of socio-political issues provides emancipatory perspectives and critical approaches for both learners and teachers. Inclusion of these topics by teachers, therefore, plays a pivotal role in understanding the importance of critical pedagogy, participatory approach and socio-political issues.

**The Study**

**Research Questions**

1. What do English instructors think about the teaching of socio-political topics in classroom settings?
2. What do English instructors think about critical pedagogy and the use of participatory approach in teaching English?
3. What topics would English instructors discuss in an ideal setting where democracy would be developed?

**Methodology**

This study used critical reflection as a method. Critical reflection entails thinking critically over a problem, topic, event, idea and enigma and enables individuals to come up with solutions and recommendations by going beyond superficial thinking or what is already given to individuals in their social, political or educational settings (Brookfield, 1995; Hickson, 2011; Schön, 1983). In this process, when individuals encounter a challenging situation on a social or political level, they are asked to make attempts to take action and develop a critical perspective towards risky or challenging situations. Thus, individuals are asked to critically reflect upon social and political issues or other challenging situations and topics so that they can improve new perspectives. Critical reflection consists of reflection on action, reflection in action, reflection for action and reflection about action (Schön, 1983). This study is limited to only reflection on action that can be defined as a meta-cognitive process explaining what individuals think and do. Reflection on action has three dimensions that can be listed as personal thought, deliberate action and critical reasoning (Van Woerkom, 2010; Dinkelmann, 1999; Tillema, 2000). Personal thought is related to awareness of one's own beliefs, acts, actions, ideas, behavior and attitudes. Deliberate action entails bringing explanations and reflection upon the context and setting where practice is implemented. As for

critical reasoning, it deals with the possible consequences of their immediate acts, beliefs, behaviors and ideas. Critical reflection aims to focus on the gap between what individuals think and do in their settings or contexts.

Topics that contained social and political elements were given to the participants. The topics given were thought-provoking and were not included in the main curriculum and syllabus. A semi-structured interview form was also provided to elicit the views of the participants regarding the use of participatory approach. Socio-political topics on the agenda were extracted from national and international newspapers. These socio-political themes were composed of minorities, gender, LGBT, religion, national/international political issues such as Trump's policies and Turkey's political stance, race, sex, sex education, social issues such as child marriages in Turkey and nuclear weapon risks, nationalism and evolution.

## Participants

The study was carried out with 20 instructors in a preparatory school of second languages. Each participant taught English at least 24 hours and had an average 5 year experience.  Language leader and Oxford EAP textbooks were used. Four main skills were aimed in the curriculum. The intended level was B2. English for Specific purposes was also taught 2 hours a week.

## Procedure

The researchers browsed 10 national and international newspapers online and extracted socio-political issues on the agenda between September and October in 2018. Different striking topics that caused social and political negotiations in Turkey were listed. In the second stage, a focused group interview was conducted with the participants in a university meeting room. They were given the topics and asked whether they discussed these topics in their classroom settings. The participants were also given information about the content and nature of the study as well as critical reflection process. They were asked to give information as a warm-up activity about the content of the curriculum and syllabus that they used in their department and classrooms. They were also asked to list the topics that were covered in global textbooks and to list the topics that they negotiated in classroom settings. In the third stage, the participants were given the list of topics that were chosen by the researchers and asked to list which topics they would discuss in an ideal setting where they would be able to take risks in their immediate context. They were later given certain topics released in the national and international newspapers and were asked whether they would negotiate those socio-political issues in their classrooms as a part of participatory approach. They were also told to justify their reason why they answered so. After the data were collected and analyzed, the findings of the study were shown to the participants to obtain feedback so that validity and reliability of the findings could be provided.

## Findings

The overall findings show that the participants tended to ignore socio-political issues in ESL classrooms since they reported that they had to follow the curriculum and textbooks. It was found that only anodyne topics were mentioned in the classroom settings because the current political atmosphere of Turkey would put them into a risky position. Therefore, they found the negotiation of socio-political issues on the agenda rather threatening and risky.

**Findings Related to the use of Participatory Approach**

All the participants reported that they were partially familiar with the participatory approach while majoring in English Language Teaching during their BA. Critical pedagogy and participatory approach was only once mentioned because modern approaches such as communicative language teaching were regarded as more important when compared to participatory approach. However, they stated that they never used this approach in their classrooms because of different reasons:

> *I am, to some extent, aware that participatory approach involves socio-political issues. However, my department, where I work as an instructor, does not allow us to discuss such risky issues. In addition, I have to follow the global textbooks that include different topics. I have difficulty even discussing these topics in my class. (P1).*

> *I do not think that I can do a lot in the class because Turkish students are not ready to discuss daily topics such as politics and social issues because we do not have this democratic culture. Besides, the administrators push us to follow the curriculum shaped by the curriculum office. There seems no slot for other kinds of discussions. (P2).*

Informants described the difficulty of using the participatory approach because of socio-political and departmental reasons. The participants tended to avoid taking risks to discuss national and international issues, although they were aware that the approach was important as a method to debate real life topics. They reported that the students were not ready because the education system did not equip them with a democratic background. Thus, it can be said that there seems no room for discussion of socio-political issues owing to the historical background of Turkey and the students that have been often told not to raise or comment on these issues. Another possible and strong problem we claim is that the current political atmosphere could not allow them to raise these risky issues because any kind of criticism of the government or the history of Turkey as well as LGBT marriage would cause them to experience serious problems such as forced resignation, dismissal and imprisonment. Therefore, both teachers and learners find themselves rather disadvantaged because neoliberal policies in this political atmosphere in Turkey find a relaxing place for themselves, and the main agents of learning and teaching are unable to discuss those issues in the classroom setting.

**Findings Related to Discussion of National Topics**

National topics such as political, social and cultural issues were not covered by the instructors because these topics could cause confusion and segregation in the classrooms. They reported that it was safer to discuss the topics covered in the global textbooks. Thus, national topics were ignored in ESL settings. The participants were given some topics to ask them whether they discussed them in the classrooms. Some of these topics on the agenda were violence against women in Turkey, sexual harassment, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, Syrian immigrants, Syrian children in the streets, stray animals, terror in Turkey, political elections, American Pastor Brunson in Turkey, worsening Relations between Turkey and the USA, Saturday mothers in Turkey whose children were killed years ago, lost and killed children in Turkey, child marriages in the eastern part

of Turkey, Turkish economic crisis, same-sex marriage, LGBT march and parade, Islam and evolution. However, they reported that all the topics listed above were risky and unspeakable even in Turkish:

> *I can discuss these topics individually with my close friends. However, at the university we cannot debate these topics even with our colleagues. I understand what you mean but we need to be realistic. We cannot discuss these issues in Turkey. I do not think that I can dare to raise these topics in ESL classrooms. While talking, I find myself in a risky education. I trust you. I hope you will not give my name and university name. (P5).*

> We all hear these topics every day. I work in a public university. Thus, it seems unlikely to talk about them in our department. We know the political situation in Turkey. We are not in Europe. The curriculum is strict. Our students do not have this background. Maybe they want to talk about them. But things may go worse in the classroom because they may feel disturbed. (P16)

The participants developed the fear of discussing socio-political issues in their immediate context at national level. The fact that they cannot raise these issues in their classrooms and even department is the reality itself that they directly experience. Another issue is that they lack the belief that the learners have sufficient democratic skills and background to negotiate these topics and fear that confusion and conflicts may arise in the classrooms, which are actually sine qua non of radical democracy, critical pedagogy and participatory approach. However, the political effect of those in power has a suppressive and oppressive role in them. Thus, what is not discussed in ESL classrooms is not only socio-political issues at superficial level but is that power relations are not addressed.

**Findings Related to Discussion of International Topics**

The participants were interviewed about international topics on the agenda. The findings show that they preferred to talk about the topics covered in the textbooks that included international issues such as pollution, global warming, technology, different cultures, places, travel and holiday. However, the participants were told that these topics lacked socio-political issues. All of them reported that socio-political issues were not covered in global textbooks that also molded the content of the curriculum. Socio-political issues at international level were nuclear weapon risk between North Korea and the USA, criticism of capitalism, neoliberalism, feminism, LGBT rights, religious topics, minorities, racism, apartheid, gender, colonization, tension between Venezuela and the USA, trafficking, terror in the Middle East and the USA, sexual identities, immigration, child labor, genocide, mass murder and wars. However, the participants reported that they never mentioned these topics in the class since they were found risky and outside the curriculum:

> *I am responsible for following the curriculum given by the curriculum office. I follow BBC, CNN and NY Times but I cannot talk about those topics. We do not have time for those topics. In addition, our students do not follow these topics. They just want to learn general English. They can learn these issues on their own. My responsibility is to follow the curriculum. (P7)*

> *I know that these topics are important. However, it is not easy to discuss these topics in the classrooms because political issues are risky in our department. They tell us to avoid these*

*issues in the classroom because some students may show reaction. Therefore, I also avoid these issues. Our system, I think, is not ready. (P8)*

The participants came up with different reasons not to discuss socio-political issues at international level because the political atmosphere was not democratic enough for them to take risks. In addition, the administrators also told them to be cautious in the classrooms. One of the participants reported that it was the learners' responsibility to learn socio-political issues and that their responsibility was to follow the curriculum given to them. Thus, it seems that they did not provide the learners with opportunities to raise these international topics in the classroom settings.

**Findings Related to Ideal Situation of Social-Political Issues**

The participants were asked about the ideal situation of socio-political context to discuss various topics that they found risky in their immediate environment. All of the participants reported that if democratic setting at macro and micro level were ready for learners and teachers, they would negotiate socio-political issues. Thus, they said that democratic attitudes and behaviors of socio-political context, administrators, teachers, curriculum office and learners were the main criteria for them. They were asked which topics they would prefer to discuss in ESL classrooms at national level.

*Table 1. National Topics to be Discussed in an Ideal Classroom Setting*

| Item | f | | % | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Feminism/women studies in Turkey | 18 | 2 | 90.00 | 10.00 |
| Syrian immigrants in Turkey | 17 | 3 | 85.00 | 15.00 |
| Children in streets | 16 | 4 | 80.00 | 20.00 |
| Child labor in Turkey | 16 | 4 | 80.00 | 20.00 |
| Violence against women | 11 | 9 | 55.00 | 45.00 |
| Child marriages | 8 | 12 | 40.00 | 60.00 |
| Murder of Jamal Khashoggi | 6 | 14 | 30.00 | 70.00 |
| Child abuse | 6 | 14 | 30.00 | 70.00 |
| Religious topics (Islam, Christianity) | 5 | 15 | 25.00 | 75.00 |
| Islam and evolution | 5 | 15 | 25.00 | 75.00 |
| Economic crisis in Turkey | 4 | 16 | 30.00 | 70.00 |
| International politics of Turkey | 4 | 16 | 30.00 | 70.00 |
| LGBT issues | 3 | 17 | 15.00 | 85.00 |
| Sexual harassment in Turkey | 3 | 17 | 15.00 | 85.00 |
| Terror in Turkey | 3 | 17 | 15.00 | 85.00 |
| Sex and sexuality | 2 | 18 | 10.00 | 90.00 |
| Islam and LGBT | 1 | 19 | 5.00 | 95.00 |
| Political issues in Turkey | 1 | 19 | 5.00 | 95.00 |
| Minorities in Turkey | 1 | 19 | 5.00 | 95.00 |
| Nationalization/Patriotism | 1 | 19 | 5.00 | 95.00 |

The findings show that the informants tended to avoid discussing gender and political issues even if they were told that they would teach in an ideal setting where democracy would be

developed, while they opted to debate topics such as feminism, women issues, Syrian immigrants and child-related issues at higher percentages. The possible reason why they would discuss women and immigration issues is that Syrian immigrants are constantly perceptible and noticeable in their daily lives and violence against women is often represented in the media in Turkey. However, the participants held more critical views about international politics because it is possible that they answered the question based on the socio-political context in Turkey.

***Table 2. International Topics to be Discussed in an Ideal Classroom Setting***

| Item | f | | % | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Yes** | **No** | **Yes** | **No** |
| EU and Turkey | 19 | 1 | 95.00 | 5.00 |
| Islam and Europe/America | 18 | 2 | 90.00 | 10.00 |
| Immigration policies | 18 | 2 | 90.00 | 10.00 |
| Trafficking/Drug addiction | 17 | 3 | 85.00 | 15.00 |
| International politics (America, Iran, North Korea…) | 17 | 3 | 85.00 | 15.00 |
| Racism/Apartheid | 17 | 3 | 85.00 | 15.00 |
| European and American politics | 17 | 3 | 85.00 | 15.00 |
| Colonization | 15 | 5 | 75.00 | 25.00 |
| Criticism of capitalism/neoliberalism | 14 | 6 | 70.00 | 30.00 |
| Feminism/women studies | 14 | 6 | 70.00 | 30.00 |
| Evolution/Intelligent Design | 12 | 8 | 60.00 | 40.00 |
| Nuclear weapon risk | 11 | 9 | 55.00 | 45.00 |
| America and terror | 11 | 9 | 55.00 | 45.00 |
| Health system in the USA | 10 | 10 | 50.00 | 50.00 |
| Terror in the Middle East | 4 | 16 | 30.00 | 70.00 |
| Ideologies (Marxism, anarchism, socialism…) | 3 | 17 | 15.00 | 85.00 |
| LGBT issues | 3 | 17 | 15.00 | 85.00 |
| Sex and sexuality | 2 | 18 | 10.00 | 90.00 |
| Same-sex marriage | 1 | 19 | 5.00 | 95.00 |

The participants preferred to negotiate topics such as EU, Islam, immigration policies, trafficking, international politics, racism, apartheid, colonization and feminism at higher percentages, while they tended to avoid discussing issues such as terror, same-sex marriage, LGBT and sex/sexuality at lower percentages. The participants showed hesitation about debating gender, terror, same-sex marriage at both national and international level. However, their choice of socio-political issues differed considerably considering national and international context even if they were told that they would discuss those issues in an ideal setting where democracy would be developed.

**Discussion**

This study aimed to unearth the views of ESL instructors in Turkey regarding the use of participatory approach in the preparatory school of second languages. The overall results show that the instructors did not negotiate any social or political issues in classroom settings, although they were partially aware of the importance of the participatory approach. Although they believed that these topics needed to be discussed, they did not negotiate them owing to political reasons that force them to discuss only anodyne topics which hinder criticisms of power relations in the society

because they all found these topics risky and divisive. Thornbury (2013) criticizes topics chosen in textbooks which hardly allow authentic topics to be discussed in classroom settings. Philipson (1992) also develops a critical perspective to warn practitioners of neoliberal practices reinforced through English that should not be imposed as a lingua franca. Another perspective regarding the discussion of socio-political issues is that it is only English that has been validated in the context of European Union, although western countries stress the importance of diversity (Philipson, 1999, 2011). Giroux (1988, 2011) stresses the fact that teachers need to develop a critical perspective towards elements of dominant cultures because there are always excluded cultures and minorities that are hardly discussed in education. In line with this idea, Philipson (2003) states that language policies need to be deconstructed to have more liberal policies. Auerbach (1995) also emphasizes that power relations and socio-political issues are hardly negotiated in language education and that political issues need to be addressed. In addition, participatory practices can be exercised, although some conflicts might be experienced in classroom environment (Auerbach, 2001). Thus, teachers and learners should take risks of discussing risky topics, even if certain dilemmas can occur. Similarly, Berlin (2005) also considers participatory approach an effective teaching method and reveals that learners should be familiarized with individuals and groups having different racial, political ethnic, cultural, social, linguistic and economic backgrounds. Kubota (1998) also mentions that ideologies of English should be criticized in Japanese culture to create a meaningful social transformation by raising critical consciousness and awareness. Shin (2007) also addresses the importance of global English as glocalized in Korea. However, both studies hardly mention that socio-political issues need to be negotiated in classroom settings so as to deconstruct neoliberal practices of inner circle English. Therefore, the tenets and practices of participatory approach are not cited in these studies. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) say that it is practitioners that determine the content and choice of curricula. However, it seems that Ricento and Hornberger ignore the macro perspective, socio-political context where teachers or instructors may fear raising socio-political issues because criticizing those in power, policy makers or political parties entails taking serious risks. Therefore, some researchers where radical democracy is not developed tend to improve only soft discourse or mention only anodyne topics under the umbrella term of culture which is not equal to cultural politics.

However, these topics are hardly represented in global textbooks and curricula (Gray, 2010; Thornbury, 2013). Lee (2014) also found that participatory approach was hardly used in ESL classroom for North Korean refugees and that the refugee learners were seen as low achievers because of the approaches used and curriculum applied. Similarly, Fredricks (2007) used the tenets of critical pedagogy in Tajikistan with ESL learners and stressed that using critical pedagogy could be beneficial in ESL classroom by providing opportunities. Shin and Crookes (2007) also applied critical pedagogy in Korean ESL classrooms and found that using dialogues critically in classrooms might promote both learners and teachers that were not resistant to the use of critical dialogues. In the context of Turkey, the role of intercultural competence has been emphasized, although cultural components were found to be largely absent in curricula (Atay, 2005; Atay et al, 2009). Devrim and Bayyurt (2010) also found that the participants in their study reported that various cultural elements should be included into textbooks to emphasize the importance of local cultures as well. However, these findings hardly show that socio-political issues need to be negotiated in ESL classrooms because emphasis on culture is not equal to cultural politics, that is, criticism of cultural issues. Rather, these studies tend to regard international and local cultural issues as stable and normative, which do not entail being criticized. However, critical pedagogy and participatory approach are radical in that they aim to transform societies within the framework of radical and plural democracy, which are hardly negotiated in the context of language teaching

in Turkey (Atay & Ece, 2009; Çelik & Erbay, 2013; Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998; Kirkgoz, 2009; Önalan, 2005; Sariçoban & Kazazoğlu, 2012; Tekin , 2011a, 2011b). These studies tend to avoid developing radical discourses regarding English language education in Turkey since the political context of Turkey seems to allow narrow space and hinder the discussion of socio-political issues in classroom settings. Therefore, it might be right to say that these soft and anodyne discourses reinforce neoliberal practices more intensely in Turkey. English language itself is constantly exercised and reinforced by excluding other identities, languages and radical socio- political issues that may put teachers at risk. If language teachers desire to be intellectuals in Gramscian sense, they need to be aware of dangers and risks of neoliberal practices. Unless radical discourses and actions are developed, dominant cultures are sustained in Turkey and other related-cultures otherized under the effect of postcolonial discourses. Skutnabb-Kangass (2000) also interprets neoliberal practices as linguicist and linguistic genocide because English is often reinforced as a lingua franca. In addition, Skutnabb-Kangass and Dunbar (2010) maintain that the use of English without developing a bona fide critical perspective and respecting de facto diversity is a crime against human rights. Skutnabb-Kangass and Philipson (2010) claim that constantly exercising English as a lingua franca can be viewed as murder. Thus, it can be interpreted that discussion of socio-political issues at each level is an important step to produce discourses of cultural politics, radical and plural democracy intended to transform society and individuals by creating competing interpretations whose aims are not to attain a finalized and absolute solution but rather to be based on contingencies and pluralistic interpretations.

## Conclusion

This study showed that ESL instructors in the school of foreign languages were aware of the topics discussed in the media since they followed them in both national and international newspapers. However, it was found that they hardly negotiated these topics in the classrooms because of the limitations in the curriculum imposed on them and the current oppressive political atmosphere in Turkey. In addition, the instructors hardly received classes regarding critical pedagogy, participatory approach and critical thinking. Thus, it can be said that the instructors had little chance of intervening in the curriculum that hardly left any gap for them to make changes in the curriculum. It can be interpreted that socio-political issues were not given as tasks for the learners to discuss them. Only soft issues that would be unlikely to cause disagreements or offend anyone were debated in the classrooms. Therefore, we can interpret that learners taught English in line with the topics serving neoliberalism and learners' ability think critically is impeded. Therefore, curricula in English language teaching need to be revised and to include topics covered in critical pedagogy and participatory approach. In addition, ESL instructors need to be taught critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis and participatory approach so that they can also develop critical perspectives towards curriculum and in-classroom tasks. Radical democratic attitudes can be developed in English language teaching by also emancipating instructors from neoliberal textbooks that impose only anodyne topics that are hardly encountered in social settings. Instructors need to take risks while raising socio-political issues even if topics may lead to conflicts, sine qua non of democracy. Thus, critical discourses should be developed to lessen the effect of the hegemony and thin ideology of textbooks and curricula. Instructors should also make great efforts to take initiatives and free themselves from oppression of global textbooks and the imposed curricula.

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# Class Dismissed: Quantifying Achievement and the Reinforcement of Inequality

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## Abstract

*Academic achievement in American high schools is increasingly defined in terms of quantifiable values. Despite being designed to produce favorable data, explicit standardized-test preparation has an insignificant impact on scores and is counterproductive to the cultivation of attributes necessary for success in higher education and effective civic engagement. Reaffirming trends known since the 1970s, standardized test scores directly correlate to socioeconomic status (SES) across time and space, as this study of six Illinois high schools demonstrates. SES functions to engender test scores independent of curriculum decisions and to a higher degree than racial/ethnic demographics alone. Educational inequality cannot be addressed without broader systemic changes to the American political economy. To implement such changes, it is incumbent upon teachers to transcend class-specific curriculums, foster the imagining of different social realities, and develop students' propensity for collective action through critical pedagogy.*

***Key Words:*** *standardized test preparation; socioeconomic status; median household income; per pupil expenditures; race reductionism; critical pedagogy*

## The Study: Approach and School Profiles

### Approach and Methods[1]

**T**he following is an analysis of the relationship between SES, measured by median household income (MHI), and test scores through the lens of six school districts over almost twenty years. The purpose is to demonstrate that macro level trends concerning MHI and test scores are visible at the micro-level of these Illinois districts. Beyond reifying this trend, the comparative class analysis approach challenges race reductionist explanations of test performance by returning the cross-cutting impact of SES to educational achievement discourse. Race reductionist arguments unintentionally reinforce narratives divorcing student achievement from per pupil expenditures (PPE), which obfuscates applicable remedies found in advanced social democracies. A transformative curriculum is needed to both expose American political economy as the cause of educational malaise and enable the collective construction of a more equitable social reality.

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1. All tables are in the Appendix.

**The Schools**

Lincoln-Way High School District (LWHS), situated in south-suburban Chicago, is used to represent a typical white, middle-class district. To ascertain an accurate measurement of the district's household income data, the communities of Frankfort/Frankfort Square, New Lenox, Mokena, and Manhattan, are used. All public-school students in these area codes attend LWHS. Unfortunately, it is impossible to disaggregate the portions of Tinley Park and Joliet attending LWHS from their larger census area data, but the selected areas still provide a valid assessment of SES realities in the district.

Edwardsville High School (EHS), located in a suburban area east of St. Louis, was chosen because its demographics mirror those of LWHS in terms of racial/ethnic diversity and SES. At the surface, it appears EHS's MHI is much lower than the LWHS area. However, the SES data becomes far more representative once a 23.2% lower cost-of-living adjustment is calculated into the Edwardsville data.[2] The comparison is useful to demonstrate the larger argument of SES as the determinant factor affecting student test scores.

New Trier High School (NTHS), located in north-suburban Chicago, demonstrates the exceptional advantages students of economic privilege receive. NTHS draws students primarily from Wilmette and Winnetka. Racial/ethnic composition is largely similar to each aforementioned district, with the exception of a sizeable Asian American population. As this paper argues, however, race and ethnicity are not the determinant factors affecting test scores. Mirroring the findings of Annette Lareau's study on the role of race and class in socialization practices, class becomes far more significant in the daily lives of children after fourth grade than race.[3] NTHS, and the subsequent districts, display this quite vividly.

Canton High School (CHS) was chosen to underscore the overriding impact of SES, independent of marginalized racial/ethnic identities, on standardized test scores. Canton's demographics are similar to LWHS, EHS, and NTHS, but the MHI is much lower, even when adjusted for a 37% lower cost of living differences.[4] It is an unfortunate reality that race and class often intersect in the United States, but it is unwise to imagine socially-constructed race as an entity with unmalleable material characteristics.[5] This is not meant to argue race has no impact on standardized test scores. Instead, the point is to demonstrate race is not nearly as significant on tests scores as social class.[6]

Homewood-Flossmoor High School (HFHS) is a key component of this comparative analysis. Between 1999 and 2016, Homewood and Flossmoor experienced significant demographic

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2. "2020 Cost of Living Calculator," Sperling's Best Places, 31 March 2020. https://www.bestplaces.net/cost-of-living/edwardsville-il/frankfort-il/115000. For illustrative purposes and consistency, the adjustment is between Edwardsville and Frankfort.

3. Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

4. "2020 Cost of Living Calculator," Sperling's Best Places, 31 March 2020. https://www.bestplaces.net/cost-of-living/canton-il/frankfort-il/115000. This adjustment is also in comparison to Frankfort.

5. Educators overwhelmingly reject biologically determinist arguments concerning the achievement gap, instead finding explanations rooted in ethnic pluralism to be much more persuasive. Disassociated from social class, however, these cultural arguments actually generate a problematic essentialism of their own. As Touré Reed argues, such "culturalist conceptions of inequality that formally reject race as a biological category but ultimately impute a rigidity to ethnic group culture—uncoupling it from proximate material influences—treat race as a social construct in name only." See Touré Reed, *Toward Freedom: The Case Against Race Reductionism* (New York: Verso, 2020), 12.

6. There are some pseudo-scholars who revived arguments of biological determinism in the wake of the manufactured failures of Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" programs. For more information on these "misinformers," see Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994). For a dismantling of their conclusions and approach see William Julius Wilson *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). To see limitations of Wilson's argument rooted in ethnic pluralism,, see Reed, *Toward Freedom*.

changes and MHI stagnation. Despite the immense changes, however, their standardized test scores remained comparable to districts with similar SES levels and surpassed all districts in the study with lower SES levels, independent of racial/ethnic demographic changes. Although HFHS experienced rapid diversification, the standardized-test data illustrates the overriding impact of SES when compared to the other districts in the study.

Bloom Township High School (BTHS) provides an important juxtaposition to the HFHS experience. Chicago Heights experienced a similar demographic shift compared to Homewood and Flossmoor from 2000 to 2016. However, BTHS consistently performed lower than HFHS on standardized tests. BTHS consistently had the lowest MHI in the study and, tellingly, the lowest test scores in the study. While the racial demographics of a student body certainly influence test scores, social class remained a much more significant factor.

## Introduction

American high school students live in a high-stakes society. Growing inequality, rising college costs, and stagnant wages all contribute to a heightened collective anxiety, palpably felt by American educators in these troubled times. Students and parents both know that the margin for error is slim if a debt-free and meaningful future is to be realized. Every spring, high school juniors across the country partake in a routine high-stakes rite of passage: a national standardized test. Although these tests allegedly measure college-readiness, academics know that the social function of these tests is analogous to a vast sorting machine arranging students into categories of social class.[7] The best predictor of a student's score remains his or her SES, a problematic realization for an allegedly meritocratic society. This class filtration process is nothing new to the American education system and has, in fact, been documented since the 1970s.[8] While the process is not new, the precarious realities facing American students and school districts, which put a premium on pedagogical imperatives supporting explicit test preparation at the expense of a more meaningful curriculum, have amplified the crisis to unseen levels. The self-serving and reinforcing mythology surrounding student meritocracy, measured through standardized test scores, has infected curricular decisions and the allocation of educational resources to create "intellectual dead zones."[9]

The financial collapse of 2007-2008, in combination with the unrelenting neoliberal assault on social institutions, elevated the public's consciousness regarding the dubious value of standardized testing. As more institutions of higher education became test optional and states experimented with new exams, such as the Illinois Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to comply with the Obama Administration's *Race to the Top* initiative, both *College Board* and ACT felt the squeeze. [10] In response to the newly-resonating but longstanding criticisms, the *College Board* developed a partnership between themselves and the online learning platform *Khan Academy* in 2014.[11] Both nonprofit organizations promoted the partnership as a

7. Tawnell D. Hobbs. "SAT Scores Fall as More Students Take the Test." The Wall Street Journal. 24 September 2019. https://www.wsj.com/articles/sat-scores-fall-as-more-students-take-the-test-11569297660

8. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. 1976. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 31-32.

9. Henry Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 153.

10. For more information on how this initiative reproduced the core elements of *NCLB,* see Jesse Rhodes., *An Education in Politics: The Origins and Evolution of No Child Left Behind* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012) and Andrew Hartman, "Teach for America: The Hidden Curriculum of Liberal Doo-Gooders," Jacobin, 13 December 2011. https://jacobin-mag.com/2011/12/teach-for-america

11. "The College Board Announces Bold Plans to Expand Access to Opportunity." College Board. 5 March 2014. https://www.collegeboard.org/releases/2014/expand-opportunity-redesign-sat. For further reading on how *Khan Academy* is part

beneficial and free service to narrow the persistent wealth and score gaps through the sudden availability of accessible test preparation materials.

The significance of this announcement, however, rippled beyond the debut of another digital test preparatory program. For the first time, *College Board* implicitly acknowledged something it preferred to keep veiled: students' socioeconomic and racial backgrounds have a disproportionate impact on scores. For years, the organization denied that receiving external test preparation services significantly improved scores.[12] Such an admission would seem to implicitly confirm that a student's ability to afford test preparation services, in terms of cost and time, linked SES to performance. While *College Board* continued to eschew any connection that might compromise the objectivity and validity of their tests, national data demonstrated that this reality was undeniable.

The problem of SES and race/ethnicity impacting standardized test scores was not unique to the *College Board*, however. The main competitor of the *College Board's* SAT, *ACT Inc.*, displayed similar issues.[13] Through the partnership with the *Gates Foundation*-supported *Khan Academy*, *College Board* saw an opportunity to not only address social inequities in a cursory fashion, but also increase its marketability to state boards of education as the superior college-readiness test.[14] The partnership with *Khan Academy* allowed the SAT to promote itself as the better option, since it provided free test preparation to, ostensibly, any student with an internet connection. Reversing its decades-long stance on the utility of test preparation courses, the *College Board* flipped its position and proclaimed *anyone* could now receive quality test preparation and exercise more personal agency over test scores.[15] The SAT claimed this addressed the equity issue and quickly assumed the mantle as the most popular college-entrance exam nationwide, a title ACT previously held from 2011-2018.[16] Conveniently, *Khan Academy* services gave the *College Board* more cover for its inherent failures: if students did not receive the scores they wanted, it became their own faults for not taking advantage of the free preparation program. Rather than address the underlying structural issues plaguing marginalized students' test scores, the *College Board* now framed failure as an individualized and behavioral problem, following the intellectual trajectory used to justify the assault on most public goods and social programs since the 1980s.

After the proverbial handwashing, SAT aggressively marketed its new test and preparatory program to non-SAT providing states. Illinois, a state mandating the ACT since 2001, chose to adopt the SAT for the 2016-2017 school year and awarded the *College Board* a three-year contract

of the neoliberal assault on higher education, see Megan Erickson's *Class War: The Privatization of Childhood* (New York: Verso, 2015), 110-133.

12. Valerie Strauss, "Can Coaching Truly Boost SAT Scores? For Years, the College Board Said, No. Now it Says, Yes." The Washington Post. 9 May 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/05/09/can-coaching-truly-boost-sat-scores-for-years-the-college-board-said-no-now-it-says-yes/

13 . "The ACT Profile Report-National, Graduating Class 2016." ACT, INC., accessed 21 March 2020. https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/P_99_999999_N_S_N00_ACT-GCPR_National.pdf. This is also a problem plaguing the College Board's Advanced Placement tests. The same conclusions can be applied, but this study does not deal with AP score data.

14. For further reading on how the Bill Gates and other educational "philanthrocapitalists" use their foundations to dodge taxes and actively undermine the mission of public schools, see Henry Giroux. *Education and the Crisis of Public Values: Challenging the Assault on Teachers, Students, and Public Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015), 13-26.

15 . Strauss, "Can Coaching Truly Boost SAT Scores?" The Washington Post.

16. Nick Anderson, "SAT Reclaims Title as Most Widely Used College Admissions Test." *The Washington Post.* 23 October 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2018/10/23/sat-reclaims-title-most-widely-used-college-admission-test/ For more on the development of Gates Foundation-funded *Khan Academy* and its shortcomings, see Megan Erickson *Class War*, 130-140.

worth $14.3 million dollars.[17] While a variety of reasons exist to explain the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) decision to contract with *College Board*, the cosmetic solution to the equity issue certainly played a major role in the decision.

## Illusions of Agency in an Ascriptive Society

### The Case of Lincoln-Way High District 210

Responding to federal requirements mandated by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), the ISBE began requiring public high schools to administer a college-readiness test to *all students* in the 2001-2002 school year.[18] Since all students now participated in the exam, a much-anticipated drop in ACT scores occurred between 2001 and 2002 because many of the subgroups now required for testing had previously been excluded or opted not to take the exam, especially those unlikely to attend college. In any case, the drop in scores, displayed in the data of all schools selected, ushered in a new commitment to explicit test preparation. The advent of evidence-based funding, school report cards, and other indices dependent upon empirical measurements of student achievement made these curricular adjustments seem entirely necessary.

District administrators at LWHS responded to the new imperatives of standardized testing by encouraging teachers to adopt a variety of strategies to expose and train students for the ACT. These strategies included deconstructing reading passages, incorporating more graphs, charts, and diagrams to simulate the math and science sections of the ACT, and most noticeably, adopting a new graduation-required course called *Reading Seminar* in the 2004 school year.[19] Initially, *Reading Seminar* was a year-long course geared toward students quantitatively identified as needing reading assistance. Students scoring above an identified success threshold in 8th grade or those opting to take Honors English freshman year were, initially, exempt from the course. Developing literacy skills and cultivating a passion for reading is, undeniably, a laudable goal. While not exclusively developed to increase test scores, that objective was obvious, given the context of its development and its mission statement:

> The Lincoln-Way Reading Department is dedicated to improving student achievement by providing students with increased opportunities for reading narrative and expository text [sic]. The Reading curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of multiple strategies and skills to improve literal and inferential comprehension. It also focuses on vocabulary development through Latin and Greek Roots and context clues. *It is one of our goals for students to improve their performance on high-stakes standardized tests* [emphasis mine]. Finally, it is our hope and intention that students will develop lifelong reading habits.[20]

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17 . "Illinois Switching from the ACT to the SAT Instead." Belleville News-Democrat. 21 December 2015. https://www.bnd.com/news/local/article50939170.html. Though a seemingly paltry amount, the College Board generates substantial profits outside of the state contracts through various student fees and the sale of student data. For more on these predatory practices,

see Susan Adams' "How the SAT Failed America" and Douglas Belkin's "For Sale: SAT-Takers' Names. Colleges Buy Student Data and Boost Exclusivity.

18. According to the legislation, *all students* refers to 95% of students in each NCLB identified subgroup. See Mitchell Yell and Erik Drasgow, *No Child Left Behind* (Upper Saddle River: New Jersey, 2005), 22.

19. *Personal Interview*. District 210 Reading Teacher. 13 March 2020.

20. "Lincoln-Way Community High School: Reading." Consolidated High School District 210. Accessed 21 March 2020. http://www.lw210.org/academics/departments/reading/

Between the 2004-2005 school year and 2009-2010 school year, the empirical proof justifying the new course and test-centric curriculum appeared to pay dividends. LWHS's average ACT scores increased by a full point during this time, which became the *raison d'être* for requiring all incoming students to take the course beginning in 2010. More impressively, ACT scores from 2002, the year the ACT became mandatory, to 2016, the last year *all students* took the exam, increased by 8.45% or 1.8 points. At first glance, it appeared that the proof was in the pudding: the incorporation of explicit test preparation strategies served to increase achievement on the state-mandated ACT. Their pedagogical vision paid off in a seemingly tangible respect.

### Emphasis or Economics: The Comparative Case of Lincoln-Way and Edwardsville

In the data-driven nature of modern schools, catalyzed by Silicon Valley misanthropists, LWHS appeared to be on the cutting edge of progressive education. Attributing growth in standardized test scores to the curriculum shift was simply too tempting for those with a stake in the program. This analysis, however, ignored the widely-known fact that SES remains the best predictor of a student's standardized test score. During the period of score growth, had the communities of LWHS simultaneously experienced a change in SES through increased MHI? Would LWHS confirm the direct relationship between SES and standardized test scores or had they managed to transcend the confining limitations of economic environment through their test preparation programs?

To answer these questions, a compilation and analysis of household economic data for LWHS from 2002 to 2016 became necessary. Again, the year 2002 is crucial because it is the first year that all students were tested, and 2016 is the last year all students were tested before switching to the SAT. The *U.S. Census Bureau* (USCB) provided the necessary economic data, but, unfortunately, did not collect MHI at the zip code level from 2000-2010. However, the USCB did collect MHI by zip code for 1999, as part of the 2000 Census, and from the years 2011 to the present-day.[21] Luckily, measuring the growth of MHI from 1999-2016 serves the purpose of the study without meaningful distortions, since it corresponds closely to the years of legitimate testing data from 2002-2016.

The communities compromising LWHS at the beginning of the millennium were quite different than they are today. LWHS's feeder communities experienced tremendous demographic growth in the early 2000s, and the district grew from one high school with two campuses to four separate high schools by 2009.[22] These changes occurred alongside with the growth of the district's standardized tests scores. To discover whether or not LWHS's test growth occurred within the context of increasing affluence in its communities, USCB's *American Fact Finder* proved to be an invaluable resource to this study.[23] According the data, the MHI in the communities attending LWHS grew from $70,632 to $95,098 between 1999 and 2016, an increase of 34.5%.[24] For comparative purposes, the MHI for the state of Illinois remained largely flat, moving from $59,975 to $59,176, a decrease of 1.0%. While LWHS's standardized test scores from 2002 to 2016 increased by 8.5% during a period of substantial economic growth, it should come as no surprise that the

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21. I verified this through an email to the USCB. Internal Revenue Service information provided mean household income, but once I compiled it, the different methodologies distorted comparative qualities.

22. The district shuttered Lincoln-Way North, which opened in 2008, in 2016, due to financial instability and a declining rate of population growth.

23. All median household income is derived from "Community Facts." American Fact Finder. United States Census Bureau, 27 March 2020, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk

24. See Table 3.

aggregate score of Illinois students remained largely flat. State scores increased a modest 3.5%, overall, from a 19.9 to a 20.6 during the same time period.

A direct correlation certainly existed for LWHS regarding test scores and MHI. Illinois, overall, seemed to conform as well, given consistency between MHI and ACT scores. Initially, the fact that Illinois's MHI slightly decreased while its standardized tests scores slightly increased seemed problematic. However, considering that income inequality on both a national and state level increased dramatically during this time, it becomes clear that this phenomenon is responsible for the slight distortion. An *Illinois Economic Policy Institute* study verified the conclusion: the slight statewide scoring disparities in the aggregate state data could be explained by immense economic, and therefore, educational inequality in the state.[25] Since Illinois school districts draw the majority of their funding from local property tax revenues, the state has the most inequitably funded education system in the nation, which has a drastic impact on test scores.[26] Essentially, lower-class students are not only given less educational resources than their advantaged peers, but are also subjected to different pedagogical imperatives.[27] Similarly, the GINI Index, a measurement of economic inequality, in Illinois has continued to increase and reached its highest national level in 2019.[28] Certainly, the disparities in MHI led to disparities from the almost 500 high school and unit districts in the state's testing data, causing a slight deviation in the observable relationship between MHI and test scores. Furthermore, the average MHI for the entire state is obfuscated due to the wide variance in cost of living expenses across the state. For example, $59,176 results in a much higher standard of living outside of Chicago and the collar counties. The state MHI would result in higher test scores in communities with lower costs of living, proportionally speaking, than it would when compared to communities with higher costs of living. For these reasons, Illinois's MHI data and the overall standardized test scores are marginally disjointed.

This data alone does not verify the consequential relationship between SES and standardized test scores at the micro level. To further verify the connection, a district with similar demographics, levels of income, and changes in economic growth to LWHS is needed. While it may have been easy to reproduce such conditions in the collar-counties of Chicago, to truly test the argument, the analysis needed to move beyond the Chicagoland area. Edwardsville High School (EHS), situated some 30 miles outside of St. Louis, fit the aforementioned parameters.[29] Additionally, Edwardsville experienced similar amounts of MHI growth as the LWHS communities. Edwardsville experienced a 38.6% increase from $51,657 to $71,580 between the years 1999-2016. At first sight, it appears the median household income in Edwardsville is far below that of the communities representing LWHS, but once adjusted for cost-of -living differences, the numbers are representative of one another.[30]

It can be reasonably assumed, like all other high schools in Illinois following *NCLB* legislation, that standardized test preparation became an important focus in this demographically and

25. Frank Manzo IV, "The History of Economic Inequality in Illinois, 1850-2014," Illinois Economic Policy Institute 16 March 2016. https://illinoisepi.org/site/wp-content/themes/hollow/docs/wages-labor-standards/The-History-of-Economic-Inequality-in-Illinois-FINAL.pdf

26. "Funding Fundamentals: The Current Landscape." Advance Illinois, October 2015, https://www.advanceillinois.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/The-Current-Landscape.pdf

27. For more on the "hidden curriculum of social class, see Jean Anyon, "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work," *Journal of Education* 162, no. 1 (1980), 67. https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748016200106

28. Ted Cox, "Income Inequality Worsens Across the U.S., One Illinois, 27 September 2019. https://www.oneillinois.com/stories/2019/9/27/income-inequality-worsens-across-us

29. See Tables 4a-4d.

30. See Table 3. Cost of living difference calculations were found at "2020 Cost of Living Calculator," Sperling's Best Places,

31. March 2020. https://www.bestplaces.net/cost-of-living/edwardsville-il/frankfort-il/115000

economically similar suburban district. Edwardsville's similar growth in MHI led to direct growth in their test scores, comparable to LWHS, during the same period. MHI growth of 38.6% in Edwardsville led to a growth of 8.9% in their ACT scores, which is nearly identical to the growth of MHI and scores at LWHS. It is highly unlikely that this correlation could be due to identical curriculum decisions taking place at opposite ends of the state. Even if that were the case, it would be highly unlikely that the data would match up so perfectly, which indicates the immense influence of SES on standardized test scores across time and space. To paraphrase a famous philosopher, the study verifies the old adage that "schools shape their own test scores, but they do not shape them as they please."[31]

## The Limits of Race Reductionism

### Class Impact on Canton High School

It is an unfortunate reality that class and race are intertwined throughout the history of the United States. When it comes to standardized test scores, black, Hispanic, and Native American students score well below their white and Asian American peers on a regular basis. The racial/ethnic demographics of students often become the most discernible part of the data, and therefore, the underlying explanation for the noticeable variations in test scores. The belief that minority students will not perform as well as their white peers on standardized tests has become both an anecdotal and data-driven assumption.[32]

What appears discernible to the eye tends to distract from the veiled impact of SES, as demonstrated by the community attending Canton High School (CHS). Situated in the west-central portion of the state, CHS has a largely white student body, comparable to the composition of LWHS and EHS.[33] Despite having a racially comparable student body, CHS's standardized test scores are far below what would be expected, based on racial/ethnic demographics alone. CHS's average ACT scores remained, essentially, unchanged from 2001-2016, decreasing by 1.0% from a 19.3 to a 19.1. Narrowly focusing on racial/ethnic demographics cannot explain the 20% difference between their scores and those of LWHS and EHS.

Turning to the realm of SES seems to lift the quantitative fog surrounding the performance of CHS students. Students at CHS have the penultimate lowest MHI in this study, even after adjusting for cost of living.[34] Although Canton's MHI grew from 1999-2016 by 33.2%, comparable to LWHS and EHS communities, their MHI consistently remained around 30% lower than these two areas, overall, from 2011-2016 when adjusted for cost of living.[35] Once again, a direct relationship exists between MHI and standardized test scores, but significantly in the case of Canton,

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31. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive, 2006 (1852), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm

32. National data demonstrates that Asian American students perform, on average, better than their white peers. While undoubtedly still facing racism, however, contemporary Asian Americans, due to educational, housing, and financial backgrounds, have approached the malleable status of "white." For more on this process, see Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 228-229.

33. See data charts 4a-4d and 7D. Although Canton has a higher density of black students, the total number of such students is less than ten because the school report card cannot compile data if subgroups have 10 or less students. This makes such students largely insignificant in the standardized test data.

34. It is worth noting that Canton is the only agricultural community in the study. When it comes to social class, however, this is only consequential to discursive understandings of class. The nondiscursive elements of class affecting student achievement, such as the inability of students to find exchange value in college-entrance exams, the difficulties attracting and retaining high quality staff members, and an insufficient local tax base, still exist as a result of *material* class disparities.

35. See Table 3.

the trend occurs outside the singular explanation of race. Economic growth, while consequential, does not make much of a difference to standardized test scores if the community's MHI remains substantially low. Even with positive MHI growth, Canton still remained nearly 20% below the state average MHI at any point in the study. Alas, it appears economic growth alone is not enough to significantly raise achievement levels. Instead, the growth appears inconsequential unless it places the community into a significantly higher income threshold.

## Race AND Class, Not Raceclass: Homewood-Flossmoor HS and Bloom Twp. HS

Separating race/ethnicity and class into discernible analytical components required data from districts that experienced increased demographic diversity from 1999-2016. That, of course, is not a difficult endeavor in the state of Illinois. To further test the argument, however, it became necessary to find one diversifying district that experienced economic decline and another whose decline was not as pronounced during the period of increased racial/ethnic diversification. The complexities of class and race in America limit the sample size because racial diversification typically leads to economic depression in communities experiencing demographic shifts of this sort. For the purpose of the study, Bloom Township High School (BTHS) and Homewood Flossmoor High School (HFHS) are two such districts which demonstrate the independent impact of SES, divorced from race/ethnicity, on standardized test scores.

BTHS, located in south-suburban Chicago Heights, resides in the community with the lowest MHI and greatest racial diversity in the study. From 2000-2017, Chicago Heights became more demographically diverse, seeing its white population drop from 50% to 30% in that span of time, while its black and Hispanic population increased proportionally.[36] During this period of demographic change, the MHI increased only slightly from $40,626 in 1999 to $43,378 in 2016, an increase of just 6.7 percent.[37] Conventional wisdom would assume that the increased demographic diversity and relatively insignificant MHI growth would lead to a drop in test scores. Remarkably, however, test scores at BTHS remained stable from 2002-2017, starting at a 16.9 and finishing at a 17 in 2016.[38]

The experiences of BTHS, again, seem to affirm the role of MHI in two important respects. When adjusted for cost of living, students at BTHS retained the lowest MHI, and consequently, have the lowest standardized test scores of any school throughout the study. At a cursory glance, many would attribute their test performance to their demographic diversification. However, the second and more important observation dilutes this conventional wisdom since the consistency of the scores and MHI again show a direct and correlated relationship. What this shows is that demographic diversity does not immediately necessitate a drop in standardized test scores. On the contrary, the changing demographics seemingly had no effect on the aggregate ACT performance. Student SES, again, appeared to be the dominate factor. This finding, merely reproducing what the national data has long since displayed, demonstrates that racial/ethnic reductionism is a misdiagnosis of the achievement gap. Properly diagnosing the problem, rooted in economic inequality, enables material remedies to combat the achievement gap.[39] If the achievement gap actually resulted from racial and ethnic differences, solely, the possibilities for redress would be limited,

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36. See Tables 4a-4e.
37. See Table 3.
38. Bloom Township High School actually encompasses two high schools, Bloom High School and Bloom Trail High School. See Table 1.
39. As Touré Reed argues, universal material remedies *combined with* strong anti-discrimination polices are the way forward. Reed, *Toward Freedom,* 17-18.

since these socially-constructed categories are not as malleable as SES. While racial/ethnic backgrounds certainly impact standardized test scores, BTHS demonstrates that material realities play a larger role.

Homewood-Flossmoor presents an insightful comparison to the experience of BTHS. The communities of Homewood and Flossmoor attend HFHS and experienced similar demographic shifts witnessed in Chicago Heights. The combined communities of Homewood and Flossmoor, also located in the south suburbs of Chicago, were 70.9% white in 2000 and dropped to a white population of 48.3% by 2017.[40] While these communities retained a higher overall percentage of white people, the decrease itself was proportional to that of Chicago Heights. Similarly to Chicago Heights, Homewood did not experience much MHI growth from 1999-2016, increasing by less than 1% from $70,936 to $71,423. Flossmoor, on the other hand, actually experienced a decrease in MHI of 15.9%, falling from a comparatively high $103,477 in 1999 to $87,027 in 2016.[41]

The decrease in MHI, unsurprisingly, led to a drop in the standardized test scores of HFHS from 2002-2016. In 2002, students averaged a 22.0 on their ACT, which then dropped to a 20.7 by 2016.[42] While the same relationship is observed between MHI and test scores, the HFHS data reveals another significant component of SES and academic achievement. While the scores dropped along with declining MHI, it is important to note that racially/ethnically diverse HFHS's average ACT scores still exceeded those of the almost homogenously white CHS at any period in the study, further diminishing race reductionist arguments. The experience of HFHS indicates the significance of SES to test scores, even in a diversifying district. Since the SES of students attending HFHS remained relatively high compared to students attending BTHS and CHS, their scores remained better. Optimistically, the HFHS experience demonstrates higher MHI mitigates the commonly-perceived effects of diversification on standardized test scores. Again, economic growth was not the determinant factor, but instead the threshold of MHI played the most significant role affecting standardized test scores.

Although Homewood's MHI remained relatively stagnant while Flossmoor's decreased, both communities still retained an SES well-above the Illinois average. This factor prevented a reproduction of the Chicago Heights experience. Given the substantial difference in MHI between Homewood-Flossmoor and state, it would seem the scores at HFHS should be higher than they currently are. If MHI could be disaggregated into different racial/ethnic categories, a divergence in the MHI of minority and white households would become apparent and demonstrate that MHI is still the most significant factor affecting test scores. While black students at HFHS, on average, do not meet state standards at the same rates as their white peers, this does not tell the full story without integrating economic data. The ISBE state report card collects testing data by race and by class, visible through a low income designation, but it does not have data merging the two together.[43] While a general assumption can be made given the historical trends of race and class, this inaccessible data, unfortunately, leaves this conclusion to speculation. This method of presenting the data, however, is probably not coincidental. Separating race and class actually serves policy makers who prefer to present the deficiency in minority test scores as an immutable cultural phe-

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40. See Tables 4a-4e.
41. Although it is difficult to draw too many conclusions from data before 2002, it is interesting to note that the scores of Homewood Flossmoor High School in the early 2000s, coinciding with the period their MHIs were most comparable. See Tables 1 and 3.
42. See Table 1.
43. See Table 7E and 8E.

nomenon, rather than a consequence of economic circumstances, since political remedies do actually exist for the latter.[44] As the case of New Trier will elucidate, material realities not only engender academic achievement, but can also be used to mitigate these same consequences of class.

## It's the Economy, Stupid.

### Top of the Class: New Trier and SES Success

Situated on the suburban North Shore, New Trier High School is, perennially, the top ranked high school in Illinois. Their standardized test scores are a source of envy, since they consistently produce the top scores of any open enrollment high school in the state. Starting at an average of 26.0 in 2002, the school managed a steady yearly increase to reach an average of 27.8 in 2016.[45] An internal school board document from 2017 reflects on their students' collective achievement, stating "these growth measures support our belief that students in all levels of classes *experience a dynamic and engaging curriculum*, *have excellent teachers*, and are *dedicated to learning*" [emphasis mine].[46] It is clear from the school's internal study that they attribute the academic success to *agency*: a consciously created a curriculum, the development and retention of excellent teachers, and an intrinsically-motivated student body.[47]

Unfortunately, districts attempting to replicate the success of New Trier never seem to approach their level of success because they are on an impossible mission. The dream remains elusive because there is something curriculum, pedagogy, and student diligence cannot change within the classroom walls: social class. The report neglects to mention that Wilmette and Winnetka, two communities feeding into NTHS, have an MHI over 2.5 times the Illinois average, which is the overriding structural factor leading to the high levels of academic achievement, rather than the practices outlined in their internal board report.[48] Comparable rates of MHI growth occurred in these two communities as happened in LWHS, EHS, and CHS, but none of these areas came close to the MHI of NTHS at any point.

The demographic data of NTHS is representative of the population at LWHS, EHS, and CHS, as well, outside of the substantial Asian-American presence. Interestingly, NTHS is unique in one dubious demographic aspect: its student body has amongst the highest percentage of students receiving a testing accommodation, such as extended time, granted through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan in Illinois.[49] Such plans are meant to provide students with a

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44. A similar obfuscation of the role played by class occurs with other national data sets and further contributes to the use of race as a proxy for class phenomena. The United States prefers to collect health and vital statistics based upon race and gender, rather than class. The Department of Justice also neglects to collect any direct information concerning the social class of inmates. As a result of the type of data collected, factors other than class become the primary explanations for a lack of social equity. Walter Benn Michaels and Adolph Reed Jr., "The Trouble with Disparity." Nonsite.org, Issue 32. 10 September 2020. https://nonsite.org/the-trouble-with-disparity/

45. See Table 1.

46. "ACT Analysis Report for the Class of 2017," New Trier High Township High School District 203, 18 September 2017. https://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/Administration/Curriculum_and_Instruction/Documents/Reports_and_Research/Board_Report_on_ACT_Sept_2017/

47. Agency refers to the ability of school actors, such as the administration and staff, to influence academic performance through individual initiatives and policy making. This is opposed to structural explanations of academic performance, which view environmental factors as the primary influence on achievement.

48. See Table 3.

49. I commend the students of New Trier for recognizing this absurd abuse themselves, as their student newspaper makes clear. Ezra Wallach, "Testing Accommodations Four Times the National Average, Affluent Districts are More Likely to Abuse Accommodations, The New Trier News. *New Trier Township High School District 203*, 11 May 2018, https://newtriernews.org/news/2018/05/11/testing-accommodations-four-times-national-average/. The phenomenon has occurred

federally-defined disability various accommodations to ensure educational equity. Fascinatingly, almost a quarter of all students at NTHS qualify for testing accommodations. A typical testing accommodation is to grant "time and half" or "double time" on assessments, which gives students 50%-100% more additional time than non-qualifying students to take their standardized test. It is unlikely that NTHS is a statistical anomaly, whereby their students disproportionately have comprehension and processing disabilities. What is far more likely is that their parents, due to their class position, can afford the professional services it takes to diagnosis such disorders and navigate the educational bureaucracy to get favorable accommodations. Unsurprisingly, this data was not mentioned in their board's internal document, as it would indicate some forces of success are outside the agency of educational actors at NTHS. Presumably, if every district in the study had such a high percentage of students receiving extended time, scores would improve elsewhere too. Money buys educational benefits, quite literally.[50]

## You Get What You Pay For: Per Pupil Expenditures (PPE) as a Mitigating Factor

### *International Insight on the PPE Problem*

For years, educational misanthropists attempting to impose the logic of the marketplace on public education have railed against the fact that the United States spends more taxpayer money per pupil than comparable Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.[51] Reduced to mere quantitative analysis, it seems that the American education system is the quintessential bloated bureaucracy. *Time Magazine* journalist Amanda Ripley's international comparative analysis of education further legitimized this concern after her findings demonstrated American students scored substantially lower on the Programme for Internationale Assessment (PISA) than did students in foreign countries running on leaner educational apparatuses.[52] Comparatively speaking, claims of overspending and underperformance seem indisputable. A serious analysis, however, reveals such claims contain serious oversight or intellectual dishonesty.

In her book, Ripley espouses the miracle of the Finnish education system because their students scored highest on the international PISA test at a fraction of the cost spent on the students in the United States. To her credit, Ripley does concede that Finland's centralized education system allows for more funding to be directed toward students from impoverished or immigrant backgrounds, compared to wealthier and native peers. She even notes that basing educational funding on local property taxes in the U.S. ensures the wealthiest receive the best education, while poorer students are expected to succeed with less resources, further contributing to the social reproduction of achievement deficits.

Instead of continuing to focus on the structural inequalities engendering educational disparities, she turns to a classic anecdote for material inequality: expectations. Ripley shifts her focus from the allocation of educational resources to argue that since Finnish teachers view all of their

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for years at affluent Illinois schools, see Diane Rado, "Many Illinois High School Students Get Special Accommodations for ACT." Chicago Tribune. 29 April 2012. https://www.chicago.com/news/ct-met-testing-accommodations-20120429-58-story.html
For a national look at this phenomenon, see Douglas Belkin, Jennifer Levits, and Melissa Korn, "Many More Students, Especially the Affluent, Get Extended Time on the SAT" The Wall Street Journal, 21 May 2019, https://www.wsj.com/articles/many-more-students-especially-the-affluent-get-extra-time-to-take-the-sat-11558450347

50. Every additional $3,000 in MHI is equivalent to an extra two months of schooling. Erickon, *Class War*, 10.

51. The OECD is comprised of 37 countries, mainly from North America and Western Europe. Swedish demographer, Hans Rosling fittingly described them as the "country club of the United Nations."

52. Amanda Ripley, *The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got That Way* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 18.

students equally, wealth does not factor into educational achievement.[53] She goes on to argue that American educators fall victim to a self-fulfilling prophecy which claims low expectations for poor or working-class students produce predictable achievement results. If only American educators projected motivation, sincere effort, and improvement on their students, they could transcend material constraints like their Finnish counterparts!

The fundamental problem with Ripley's analysis is her inability to see the impact of Finland's robust social democracy on the educational system. When interviewing a Finnish teacher, Ripley has an epiphany when he states, "Wealth doesn't mean a thing. . . we are all the same."[54] While expectations certainly play a role in the achievement levels, these expectations do not exist in a vacuum. In the United States, these expectations are produced and reinforced by the operation of an extraordinarily unequal society and reflected in educational assessments. The mask of meritocracy allows policy makers to blame the individuals, both teachers and students, rather than the underlying mechanisms engendering the inequality.

What Ripley misses and is of utmost importance to the PPE conversation in the United States, however, is *why* Finnish teachers can imagine all students to be the same. Unlike the United States, Finnish social democracy is based upon universalism, where, in addition to education, healthcare, transportation, and housing, a vast social safety net exists to eliminate the destitution experienced by many students in the United States. American schools often provide, or are at least expected to, a modicum of the social services provided by the state in European OECD countries. The United States unquestionably has higher PPE than its counterparts because in addition to providing an education, schools feed students, provide psychological and social support, transport them to and from schools, invest proportionally heavier in safety and security, and provide sports and other extracurricular activities absent from the educational experience of their OECD counterparts. The abject poverty, often fused with dangerous residential environments, simply cannot happen to the same degree in countries embracing social democracy. Had Ripley recognized this, she would not have marveled at the lack of fancy cafeterias inside European schools, but may have instead asked why many American students rely on schools to provide breakfast and lunch.[55] The precarious existence of many American students today creates an immense anxiety concerning food, shelter, and safety not experienced with same frequency in Finland.[56] As neoliberalism continues to hollow social programs provided by federal and state governments, the responsibility falls upon schools to address the disinvestment in American students and contributes to relatively high levels of PPE.

The other element of the Finnish education system that is just as profound is their lack of focus on standardized tests. As Ripley and other sources note, the Finnish system relies on teachers to design curriculum and assessments, based upon state-provided general assessment guidelines. There are no standardized tests, outside of the *National Matriculation Test,* which is taken by their equivalent of American high school seniors. The absence of standardized tests means no instructional time is dubiously spent on explicit test preparation, as American schools are turning to.[57] How can a country which boasts of not teaching to the test manage to perennially score the highest on PISA examinations? Is it because teacher-designed assessments focus on critical reflection and

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53. Ibid. 163.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid. 214.
56. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. 2011. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 33-41, 238-245.
57. LyNell Hancock, Why Are Finland's Schools Successful?, Smithsonian Magazine*,* September 2011. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/why-are-finlands-schools-successful-49859555/

analysis in the form of written work, rather than cognitively pointless multiple choice exams?[58] Some Americans, as alluded to earlier, are in fact receiving a Finnish-style education, but it certainly is not happening at the lower echelons of the SES ladder.

### The PPE Effect on the Selected Schools

Of the schools selected in this study, PPE range from a mere $8,768 at EHS to an enviable $25,468 spent at NTHS.[59] This diversity reflects the worst-in-the-nation spending disparities present in the Illinois public school system. While the American political economy is not designed, nor intended, to alleviate the effects of poverty through redistributive policies, increasing PPE does correlate to improved academic achievement, measured through the percentage of low-income (LI) students within each building meeting or exceeding state standards in 2019. [60]

Outside of NTHS, the amount of LI students meeting or exceeding standards range from BTHS's 16% to LWHS's 32%.[61] LI students, who happen to reside in areas with disproportionally higher MHIs than their own, benefit from the class-specific education of their wider community. Is it any wonder why so many Americans feel the need to fraudulently enroll their children into more affluent districts than their own? If education is the gateway to social mobility, parents, unsurprisingly, will cross geographic lines to secure a better education.

NTHS best illustrates the transformational impact of PPE on LI students. Just over 4% of the students at New Trier are LI, which is comparable to the 5.7% of LI students at LWHS. Remarkably, the LI students at NTHS are more than twice as likely to meet or exceed state standards than their counterparts at LWHS. Sixty-six percent of LI students at NTHS meet or exceeded the state benchmarks, while only 32% managed to do so in LWHS. The reasons for the difference between the two schools is twofold: First, LI students at NTHS received instruction tailored toward affluent SES experiences and expectations, which fosters analysis, research, negotiation, and critical reflection. Depending on how long these LI students resided in the district, the benefits of the community's social capital accumulated over the years and put them in a more advantageous position than their peers at LWHS or any other school in the study. Secondly, it is undeniable that the $25,468 PPE at NTHS played a role in providing services to these students, through early intervention, continued support, and higher salaries to attract expert practitioners, helping LI students perform close to their non-low-income (NLI) peers.[62] Tellingly, LI students at NTHS meet or exceed state standards at a rate surpassing that of NLI students at any of the other five high schools. Outside of the remote possibility that LI students attending NTHS have a biological predisposition to excel at standardized tests, the cause of their success is probably due to these two factors.

Furthermore, the dynamics of MHI and PPE are further displayed when the disparities between LI students and their NLI peers are examined within the other five schools. In schools whose communities have a low MHI, the achievement disparities between these two groups is quite low, due to the fact that many of the NLI peers are themselves barely escaping the LI designation. The engendering effects of social class continue to operate on both groups. A significant portion of the

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58. Ripley, *The Smartest Kids*, 140.
59. See Table 5 for PPE data.
60. According to the ISBE, low-income students include those eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, live in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid.
61. See Tables 8a-8F.
62. Depending on level of experience and educational attainment, teachers at New Trier can earn double the salary of teachers at Canton and about $40,000-$60,000 more than the other schools in the study.

PPE at these schools also fund many services that are unrelated to education but needed by an underserved population. The schools with the highest achievement disparities between LI and NLI students, EHS and LWHS, (and to a lesser extent HFHS), had the lowest PPE when indexed to their communities' MHI levels. HFHS appears to have mitigated the disparity between the two groups by spending almost $7,000 -$9,000 more on PPE than LWHS and EHS, respectively. Achievement levels of NLI students at HFHS are also not as high as LWHS and EHS, due to substantial economic decline over the past 20 years.

NTHS, on the other hand, with its extremely high PPE, appears to have replicated the Finnish model through their ability to allocate adequate resources to all students. The disparities between their LI students and NLI students meeting or exceeding expectations is only 17%. The results concerning MHI, PPE, and quantified academic achievement reveal the outright dishonesty and/or false consciousness of those who deny the ability of increased spending on students to significantly impact success. Even Ripley admitted finding that the factors mattering most to an effective education are teacher pay and spending equity.[63] The questions are now clear. Do policy makers actually wish to fix these issues and how can they be effectively addressed?

### Fighting for an Egalitarian Future: A Transformational Curriculum

### We "Khannot" Change the Scores: Critical Pedagogy and Education for Liberation

Measured by any standard, explicit test preparation is an insignificant exertion of effort with little bearing on academic achievement. Practicing explicit test preparation, paradoxically, serves to reinforce inequality by confining the imagination, creativity, and authenticity of students within the parameters of a multiple-choice exam. This only further reifies the concrete experience of social class. *Khan Academy* certainly has not made a difference in the national test scores from 2017 to 2019, observable through static national scores from 2017-2019. Interestingly, the scores of Illinois, LWHS, EHS, and BTHS decreased since the development of the digital test prep program.[64] As anticipated, *Khan Academy*, aside from a colossal waste of time, was nothing more than a mere marketing tool.

Educators, embodying the role of activists and organizers, are on the frontline of a potentially powerful social transformation. They must reject the adoption of top-down pedagogical initiatives perpetuating oppression by adopting the methods of critical pedagogy, described by Henry Giroux as:

> The educational movement guided by both passion and principle to help students develop a consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, empower the imagination, connect knowledge and truth to power, and learn how to read both the word and the world as part of a broader struggle for agency, justice, and democracy.[65]

The current imperatives in the test-driven culture resemble what Paulo Freire terms the "banking model of education," whereby education is used as an instrument of domination. The banking model only deposits information into students and disconnects them from the structural totality of their oppression. Through this educational distortion, students become acclimated to their reality

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63. Ripley, *The Smartest Kids,* 215.
64. See Table 2.
65. Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values*, 116.

and are denied the ability to challenge inequitable conditions. The more students work at storing these deposits, the less likely they are to develop a critical consciousness and intervene as social transformers.[66] Explicit test preparation in the classroom only serves to further entrench this damaging model of education and limits the possibilities of a more egalitarian future.

The effective education needed to transform the current system can be found in Freire's antithesis of the banking model, which he titles the "problem-posing approach." In this approach, reality is not presented as a closed and limiting order to which students adjust. Instead, reality is presented as a problem to be transformed in a mutually collaborative process. For authentic liberation, the teacher-student hierarchy must be transformed into a process where each teach and learn from one another. Instructors cannot programmatically lead students to liberation by depositing information, but must instead engage in a collaborative process of unveiling reality. Problem-posing education allows a critical consciousness to develop and prompts intervention in the present reality. Unlike the banking model, the world becomes an object requiring transformative action.[67]

Concretely, this entails a shift in student assessment from standardized test preparation to writing essays, creating research papers, working collaboratively with peers on social action projects, and learning how to filter and use mass media effectively. Most importantly, it means connecting what is learned to their immediate environments, in addition to places and people far removed from their own social experience.[68] These are the methods and assessments which cultivate curiosity, develop character, instill feelings of community, and develop the capacity for democratic citizenship.[69] If educators aspire to emancipate their students' minds and cultivate the desire to not just fit into society but transform it, they must resist the movement to incarcerate imaginations through explicit test preparation. If the responsibility falls upon educators to condition the quality of students' futures, it is incumbent upon them to design assessments raising the degree of their consciousness, model appropriate means of action, unfetter their dynamic creative forces, and further develop their intellectual faculties.[70]

## Teaching is Political

Pedagogy of this sort is not politically neutral. In fact, no act of teaching can be apolitical because teachers, knowingly or not, reinforce the dominant culture through teaching in an "objective manner." Objectivity cannot exist in any classroom because if power is not named, questioned, or challenged by an educator, that particular lesson serves to reinforce the dominant ideas of existing power relations. The struggle over educational policy, expressed in funding and pedagogy, is always a contest of power. Giroux reminds us that learning will always be political because it is connected to the formation and acquisition of agency. Educators must reclaim the buzzword *critical thinking* as the ability to question "commonsense" assumptions and evaluate such ideas in terms of their genesis, development, and purpose, if we are serious about educational transformation.[71] The sidelines do not exist in the educational profession: teachers either perpetuate ine-

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66. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. 1970. (Bloomsbury Academic: New York, 2015), 71-87.

67. Ibid.

68. Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values*, 68.

69. William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite & the Way to a Meaningful Life* (Free Press: New York, 2014), 50.

70. Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Africa on the Move*. 1977 (London: PANAF, 2002), 522.

71. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy,* 40.

quality, inadvertently or intentionally, or they become agents of social change. Embracing a revolutionary pedagogy is an act of rebellion, but it is a rebellion to reclaim the dynamism of learning, the possibilities of an egalitarian world, and the tremendous enthusiasm imbedded in our students.

While reassessing the purpose and effectiveness of test preparation is a start, meaningful educational reform cannot be separated from economic and political reform. Every moment spent on test preparation serves to reinforce the system confining the imaginative and political potential of our students. Collaborative educational praxis offers the possibility of destroying the ideological barriers created by the material circumstances of capitalism, which contribute to the universal alienation of our students. Subcommandante Marcos, an educator and leader of the Zapatista uprising, applicably reflected on his own path to rebellion, stating, "understanding that there is injustice, then trying to understand the roots of this injustice. . . invariably leads you to ask yourself: and you, what are you going to do about it?"[72] As one of the last democratic spaces available to discuss such transformative questions, teachers must resist pedagogical practices designed to reproduce the structural inequalities shaping our students' futures and ensure education remains the practice of freedom.

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72. Nick Henck, *Subcommander Marcos: The Man and the Mask*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 10.

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**Appendix: Tables**

*Table 1: ACT Scores 1999-2017*[73]

| Year | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| National | 21 | 21 | 20.8 | 20.8 | 20.8 | 20.9 | 20.9 | 21.1 | 21.2 | 21.1 | 21.1 | 21 | 21.1. | 21.1 | 20.9 | 21.0 | 21.0 | 20.8 | 21 |
| Illinois | 21.5 | 21.5 | 21.7 | 19.9 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.1 | 20.3 | 20.3 | 20.5 | 20.6 | 20.5 | 20.6 | 20.6 | 20.3 | 20.4 | 20.5 | 20.6 | 21.2 |
| Lincoln-Way | 22.8 | 22.7 | 22.9 | 21.3 | 21.4 | 21.7 | 22.0 | 21.8 | 21.8 | 22.2 | 22.6 | 22.7 | 22.9 | 23.0 | 22.5 | 22.7 | 22.8 | 23.1 | 23. |
| Edwardsville | 22.7 | 22.3 | 22.5 | 21.3 | 21.7 | 21.4 | 21.6 | 22 | 21.9 | 22.1 | 22.3 | 22 | 22.8 | 22.7 | 23 | 22.7 | 22.9 | 23.2 | 24 |
| New Trier | 23.6 | 26.0 | 26.7 | 26.0 | 26.3 | 26.4 | 26.8 | 26.8 | 27.1 | 26.9 | 27.4 | 27.2 | 27.5 | 27.7 | 27.5 | 27.4 | 27.5 | 27.8 | 27.8 |
| Canton | 22.1 | 21.6 | 22.9 | 19.3 | 18.9 | 19.2 | 19.1 | 20.2 | 18.7 | 20.3 | 20.1 | 20.1 | 19.6 | 19.4 | 19.3 | 19 | 19.1 | 19.1 | 21.6 |
| Homewood-Flossmoor | 22.7 | 22.1 | 22.5 | 22.0 | 21.4 | 21.4 | 21.3 | 21.6 | 21.5 | 21.5 | 21.5 | 20.7 | 21.5 | 21.3 | 21.1 | 20.7 | 20.7 | 20.7 | 20.8 |
| Bloom | 19.1 | 18.5 | 18.7 | 16.9 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 17.2 | 17.2 | 17 | 16.9 | 16.6 | 16.5 | 16.6 | 16.5 | 16.9 | 17 | 17 | 18.5 |

*Table 2: SAT Scores, 2017-2019*[74]

| Level | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Illinois | 1015.9 | 1000.7 | 994.5 |
| National[75] | 1060 | 1067 | 1059 |
| Lincoln-Way | 1106.8 | 1110.9 | 1103 |
| Edwardsville | 1095 | 1076 | 1063.7 |
| New Trier | 1228 | 1235.9 | 1239.5 |
| Canton | 971.5 | 990.6 | 986.6 |
| Homewood-Flossmoor | 1011 | 1007.2 | 1015.7 |
| Bloom | 902.4 | 894.5 | 882.5 |

*Table 3: Mediana Household Income 1999-2017*[76]

| Area | 1999 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Illinois | 59,975 | 56,576 | 56,853 | 56,797 | 57,166 | 57,574 | 59,176 | 61,229 |
| 60423 (Frankfort) | 74,921 | 97,151 | 96,616 | 95,667 | 95,520 | 96,175 | 97,703 | 100,098 |
| 60448 (Mokena) | 72,296 | 101,456[1] | 99,461 | 95,201 | 96,105 | 97,027 | 96,654 | 100,262 |
| 60451 (New-Lenox) | 71,406 | 90, 521[1] | 89,181 | 91,980 | 93,421 | 96,626 | 101,580 | 105,146 |

73. "Report Card Library Data." Department of Data Strategy and Analytics. Illinois State Board of Education. 30 March 2020. https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Illinois-State-Report-Card-Data.aspx

74. Ibid.

75. Anna Aldric, Average SAT Scores Over Time: 1972-2019, PrepScholar, 6 October 2019. https://blog.prepscholar.com/average-sat-scores-over-time.

76. Community Facts. "American Fact Finder," United States Census Bureau, 27 March 2020, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 60442 (Manhattan) | 63,906 | 79,952[1] | 77,278 | 76,206 | 77,500 | 80,405 | 84,458 | 91,702 |
| 60091 (Wilmette) | 107,767 | 130,243 | 130,088 | 129,551 | 126,471 | 131,192 | 138,322 | 148,462 |
| 60093 (Winnetka) | 127,809 | 146,477 | 156,394 | 163,719 | 146,966 | 156,047 | 170,582 | 173,919 |
| 62025 Edwardsville | 51, 657 | 78,006 (96,103) [77] | 76,936 (94,785) | 72,877 (89,743) | 72,701 (89,567) | 72,744 (89,620) | 71,580 (88,186) | 76,407 (94,133) |
| 61520 Canton | 33, 360 | 41,067 (56,261) [78] | 41,888 (57,386) | 44,542 (61,022) | 44,604 (61,107) | 43,096 (59,041) | 44,436 (60,877) | 46,382 (63,543) |
| 60430 Homewood | 70,936 | 73,218 | 73,597 | 72,754 | 69,680 | 69,028 | 71,423 | 72,715 |
| 60422 Flossmoor | 103,477 | 106,114 | 99,844 | 98,140 | 98,708 | 90,357 | 87,027 | 103,023 |
| 60411 Chicago Heights | 40,626 | 43,346 | 43,983 | 41,537 | 41,828 | 41,188 | 40,283 | 43,378 |

**Table 4a: Demographic Changes, White[79] by selected Zip Code in Percent 2000-2017[80]**

| Zip Code | 2000 | 2010 | 2017 (est.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60423 (Frankfort) | 94.7% | 91.0% | 89.4% |
| 60451 (New Lenox) | 97.6% | 96.4% | 96.3% |
| 60448 (Mokena) | 96.8 | 94.7 | 95.7 |
| 60442 (Manhattan) | 97.6 | 95.2 | 97.1 |
| 60091 (Wilmette) | 89.6 | 85.4 | 86.1 |
| 60093 (Winnetka) | 93.9 | 92.4 | 90.5 |
| 62025 (Edwardsville) | 89.4 | 89.3 | 87.3 |
| 61520 (Canton) | 91.2 | 88.2 | 90.9 |
| 60430 (Homewood) | 76.3 | 58.9 | 55.0 |
| 60422(Flossmoor) | 65.5 | 47.1 | 41.6 |
| 60411 (Chicago-Heights | 49.7 | 35.7 | 31.1 |

**Table 4b: Demographic Changes, Black or African American Population by selected Zip Code in Percent 2000-2017**

| Zip Code | 2000 | 2010 | 2017 (est.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60423 (Frankfort) | 3.7% | 4.2% | 4.6% |
| 60451 (New Lenox) | .3% | .6% | .7% |
| 60448 (Mokena) | .6 | 1.2 | 1.8 |

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77. Parenthesized numbers are adjusted for cost of living. Cost of living, compared between Edwardsville and Frankfort in 2020, is 23.2% higher for Frankfort, excluding taxes and childcare, which would seemingly lead to an underestimation.

78. Ibid., but 37% higher for Frankfort than Canton, excluding taxes and childcare.

79. Socially-constructed whiteness, displayed in census data, can be misleading since "White-Hispanic" is included in this number. The census does not consider "Hispanic" a race, but instead lists it as an ethnicity to be used in conjunction with "white" or "black." This, obviously, overinflates the number of "whites" in a given area. For more on the social construction of "whiteness" see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

80. Community Facts. "American Fact Finder," United States Census Bureau, 27 March 2020, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60442 (Manhattan) | .4 | 1.0 | .2 |
| 60091 (Wilmette) | .6 | .8 | .8 |
| 60093 (Winnetka) | .4 | .6 | .2 |
| 62025 (Edwardsville) | 7.6 | 6.4 | 8.7 |
| 61520 (Canton) | 7.3 | 6.8 | 7.2 |
| 60430 (Homewood) | 19.3 | 34.7 | 36.9 |
| 60422(Flossmoor) | 27.9 | 47.1 | 55.8 |
| 60441 (Chicago Heights) | 37.8 | 49.3 | 51.6 |

**Table 4c: *Percentage of Hispanic or Latino Population by Zip Code, 2000-2017*[81]**

| Zip Code | 2000 | 2010 | 2017 (est.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60423 (Frankfort) | 3.0% | 5.4% | 5.7% |
| 60451 (New Lenox) | 3.1% | 5.4% | 6.0% |
| 60448 (Mokena) | 3.0 | 4.9 | 6.2 |
| 60442 (Manhattan) | 2.3 | 2.3 | 5.2 |
| 60091 (Wilmette) | 2.1 | 3.3 | 3.1 |
| 60093 (Winnetka) | 3.8 | 5.1 | 4.2 |
| 62025 (Edwardsville) | .9 | 1.7 | 2.1 |
| 61520 (Canton) | 1.9 | 3.8 | 4.7 |
| 60430 (Homewood) | 3.1 | 6.0 | 6.5 |
| 60422(Flossmoor) | 2.3 | 3.1 | 3.9 |
| 60411 (Chicago Heights) | 17.1 | 23.8 | 25.2 |

**Table 4d: *Percentage of Asian American Populatin by Zip Code, 2000-2017***

| Zip Code | 2000 | 2010 | 2017 (est.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60423 (Frankfort) | 1.8% | 2.1% | 2.8% |
| 60451 (New Lenox) | .4% | .7% | .6% |
| 60448 (Mokena) | 1.1 | 1.8 | 2.3 |
| 60442 (Manhattan) | .2 | .7 | .5 |
| 60091 (Wilmette) | 8.1 | 10.8 | 15.1 |
| 60093 (Winnetka) | 3.3 | 4.4 | 5.7 |
| 62025 (Edwardsville) | 1.3 | 1.9 | 1.6 |
| 61520 (Canton) | .4 | .6 | .2 |
| 60430 (Homewood) | 1.6 | 1.4 | 2.2 |
| 60422(Flossmoor) | 4.1 | 2.5 | 1.5 |
| 60411 (Chicago Heights) | .6% | .4% | .4 |

**Table 5: *Per Pupil Expenditures, Fiscal Year 2019*[82]**

| | |
|---|---|
| Lincoln-Way | 11,479 |
| New Trier | 25,468 |
| Edwardsville | 8,768 |
| Canton | 11,339 |
| Homewood-Flossmoor | 18,212 |
| Bloom Twp. | 17,274 |

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81. This includes any race, "white" or "black."
82. "Illinois Report Card." Illinois State Board of Education. 2019. https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/
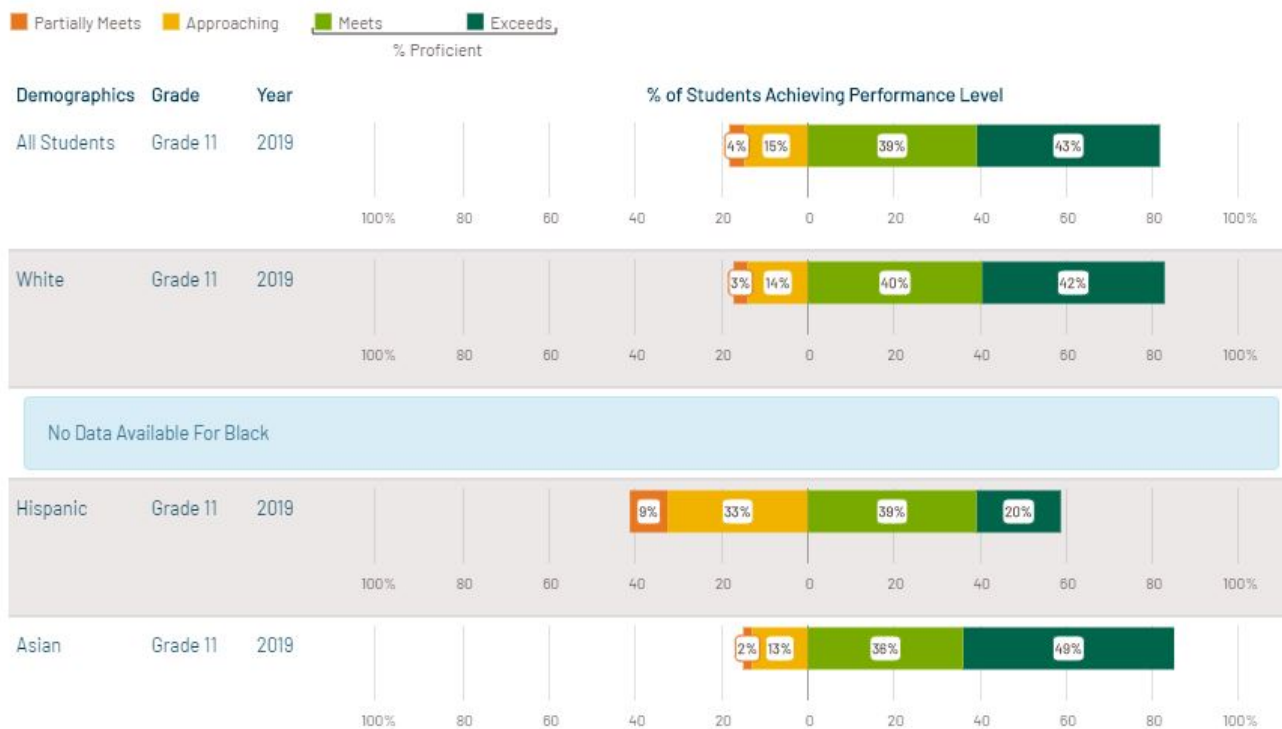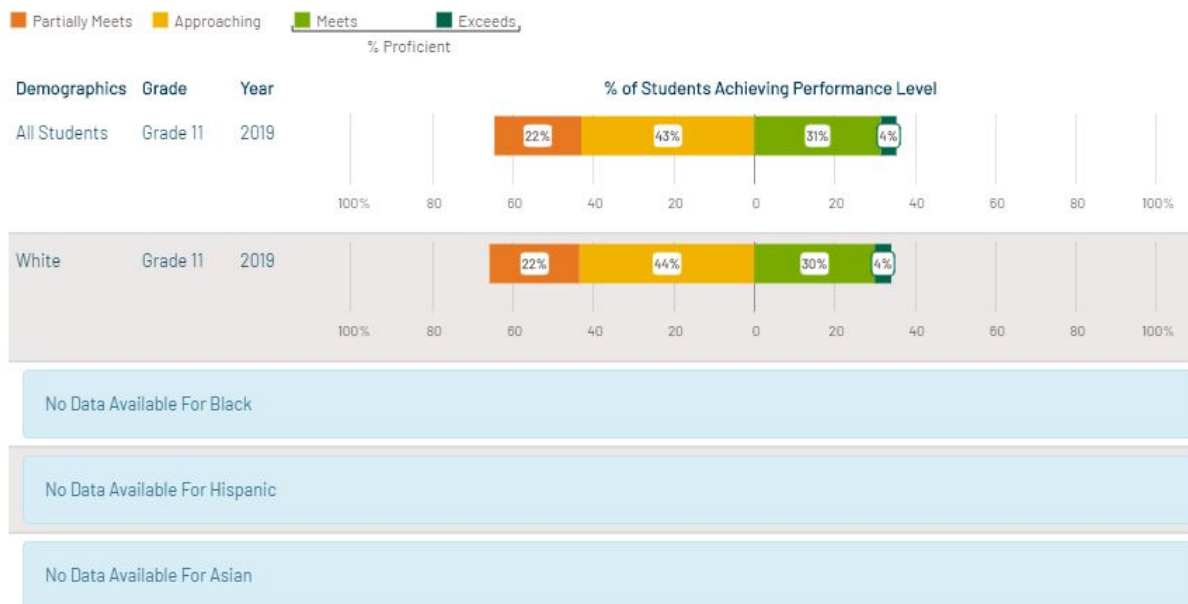
***Table 6: Percent of Students at Performance Level Intervals ELA By Race/Ethnic Group, 2019***[83]
***6A: Lincoln-Way District 210***



***6B: Edwardsville***



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83. Ibid.

## 7C: New Trier



## 7D: Canton

## 7E Homewood-Flossmoor

**Legend:** Partially Meets · Approaching · Meets · Exceeds
% Proficient

% of Students Achieving Performance Level

| Demographics | Grade | Year | Partially Meets | Approaching | Meets | Exceeds |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All Students | Grade 11 | 2019 | 8% | 34% | 39% | 19% |
| White | Grade 11 | 2019 | 7% | 34% | 38% | 21% |
| Black | Grade 11 | 2019 | 21% | 48% | 31% | |
| Hispanic | Grade 11 | 2019 | 15% | 21% | 49% | 15% |
| Asian | Grade 11 | 2019 | | 29% | 29% | 43% |

## 7F: Bloom

**Legend:** Partially Meets · Approaching · Meets · Exceeds
% Proficient

% of Students Achieving Performance Level

| Demographics | Grade | Year | Partially Meets | Approaching | Meets | Exceeds |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All Students | Grade 11 | 2019 | 47% | 35% | 16% | 3% |
| White | Grade 11 | 2019 | 39% | 30% | 25% | 5% |
| Black | Grade 11 | 2019 | 55% | 30% | 13% | 2% |
| Hispanic | Grade 11 | 2019 | 40% | 40% | 16% | 4% |

***Table 8: Percent of Students at Performance Level Intervals ELA By Low-Income and Non-Low-Income Group, 2019*[84]**
***8A: District 210***
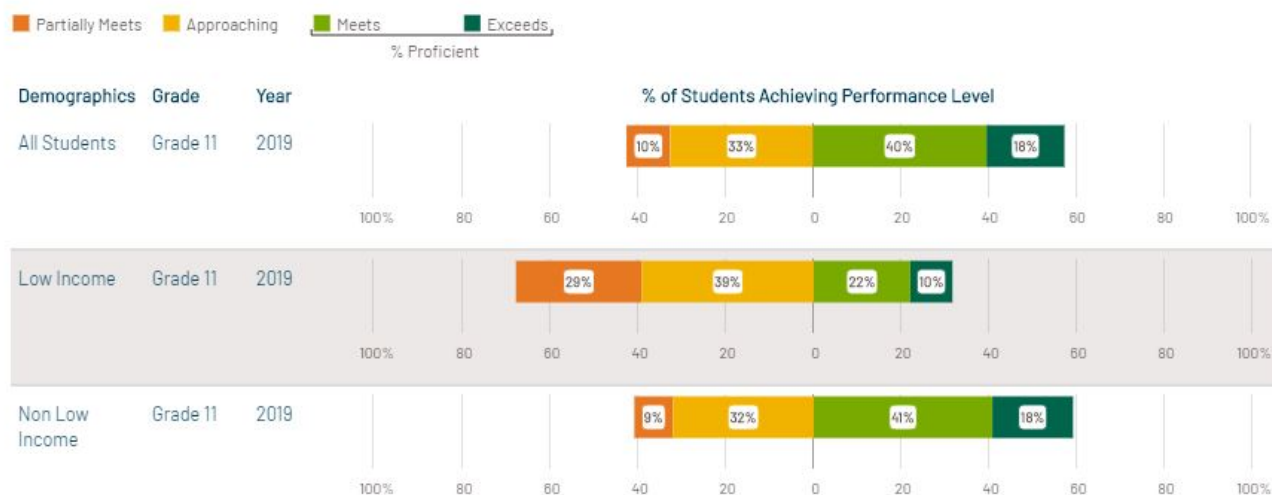


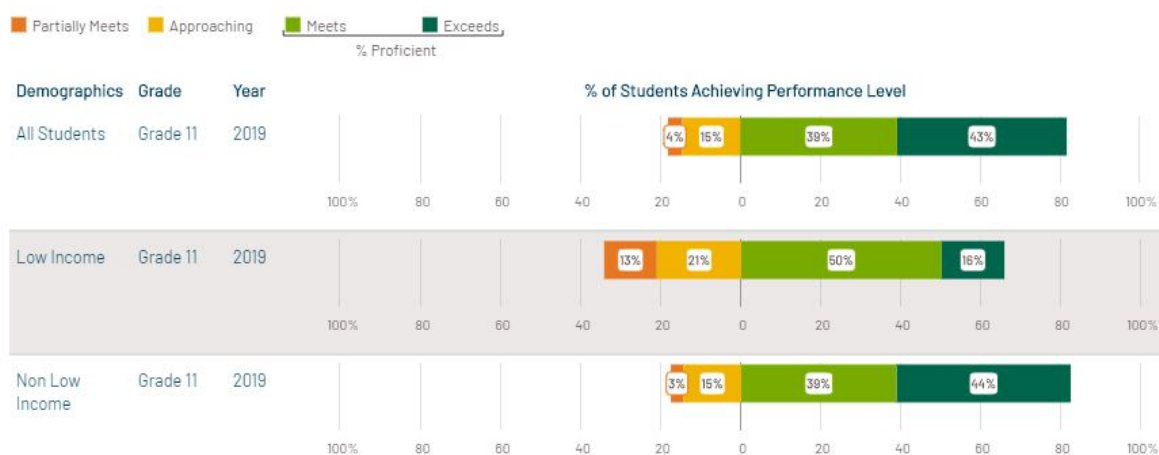***8B: Edwardsville***



84. "Illinois Report Card." Illinois State Board of Education. 2019. https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/

### 8C: New Trier



### 8D: Canton



### 8E: Homewood-Flossmoor

## *8F: Bloom*