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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

It is with the utmost joy that I welcome readers to the first issue of #CritEdPol, A Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies at Swarthmore College. After nearly 15 years of educator-scholar-activism (Suzuki & Mayorga, 2014) in New York City, I arrived at Swarthmore College in August of 2014 ready to teach, research, and engage in addressing the social conditions that shape education and the broader society. I do not privilege any one area of “the work” over the others, but instead attempt to *hacer trenza* (braid) these different strands (Gonzalez, 1998). I approach working with my students as invitation to do this kind of braiding work, and thus was born the Critical Education Policy Studies group (CEPS) and soon after our journal #CritEdPol.

So what is the purpose of #CritEdPol and what do we, the CEPS study group, mean by critical education policy studies? #CritEdPol is an open access, online, journal that centers on the perspectives and ideas of undergraduates and “on the ground” education advocates (teachers, youth, families, organizational activists, etc) as a means to make education policy accessible to a broader cross-section of people invested in the issues that shape education today. As we mention in our description of the journal, “#CritEdPol is a space for critical discussions of education policies and education-related issues, and their relationships to various communities and educational practice.” By creating a space where the ideas and voices of those who are often directly affected by education policy formations but at the same time on the margins of policy, we hope to contribute to enriching policy conversation and being part of a push toward more responsive and just education policy.

But, what do we mean by doing critical education policy studies? To us, doing critical work is an evolving perspective that counters views that frame policy as apolitical, intrinsically technical, rational, action-oriented instruments used by decision makers to solve problems². Instead we view policy as social phenomena that are connected to socio-historical context, ideologies, institutions, and individuals involved in the formation and implementation of policy. As such we are not so much thinking *about* policy but instead “thinking through” (Shore & Wright, 1997) educational policy and the many intricacies that are involved in forming a policy and its subsequent material and cultural effects.

Of course tied to thinking through policy is writing. Underlying the journal is the notion that “writing is thinking” (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). A common narrative

²Inspired by Shore, C., & Wright, S. (1997). *Anthropology of policy: Critical perspectives on governance and power*. London; New York: Routledge.

about writing is that you only write when you have completed all research and are ready to “dump” all that you have learned into a formal paper. Moving away from this narrative I envision writing an article for #CritEdPol as a stopping point in a longer arch of inquiry that the author is following. In this first issue, I asked the authors to engage in a process of thinking and writing that follows our developing critical education policy framework. They were asked to, among other things, identify the policy problem, critique extant policy work, map who the policy actors involved in the issue are, and consider future directions.

The writing process in this issue was wonderfully supported by the good people at Swarthmore College’s Writing Program. Under the guidance of Jill Gladstein, director of our Writing Program, and Maggie Christ, our indispensable Writing Associate (WA), the authors spent the last few months going through the process of drafting and refining their pieces (all while balancing their other academic work). After they had submitted their papers, the authors commented how much they enjoyed being able to think through both the content and structure of their writing. In the end this experience was, in my mind, a fine example of writing as thinking, and now that the pieces are presented in the journal the authors are inviting readers to think along with them.

The authors address education policy questions and problems that are as broad and deep as the field is. We begin with the fight for ethnic studies in California public schools. **Tania Uruchima** looks at this policy issue from two angles: the legislative push for the state to take action, and grassroots organizing by community organizers, students, teachers, parents, and others. Looking at the convergence of these two narratives, Uruchima argues that policy work in California must focus on funding and facilitating the centering of grassroots voices within this policy struggle.

Elias Blinkoff takes readers into the area of dyslexia on the state and federal levels. Blinkoff argues that “despite its prevalence as a language disorder characterized by impaired reading ability, researchers have struggled to define dyslexia, contributing to variability across state-level educational policies on dyslexia and preventing students with the disorder from being identified, and ultimately receiving appropriate intervention services” (p.20). Blinkoff suggests that there are important extant policies and pieces of legislation that can be used to move us forward in creating more optimal learning conditions for students with dyslexia.

Esteban Cabrera-Duran, then moves into the national question of recruiting and retaining teachers of color. Cabrera-Duran presents a case for recruiting teachers of color and examines the development and support for programs that would lower teacher turnover rates. What is most powerful in this piece is the recognition that this policy issue is about more than just diversity and inclusion of people of color in

the teaching force. Rather it is an issue deeply embedded in the effects of structural racism in education and our society.

Continuing with the theme of diversity, **Robert Zipp** examines the lack of diversity in gifted education. Zipp traces the development of gifted education in the United States and demonstrates how fraught and divided this aspects of education policy has been over the last century. Zipp proposes the implementation of overarching guidelines for gifted education programs in the United States based on a Controlled Choice model of admissions for gifted and talented programs that receive federal funding.

To close our first issue, we have a reflective piece by Swarthmore alumnae and educator-scholar-activist, **Sabrina Stevens**. Stevens reflects on her decade of work since graduating from Swarthmore, where she moves readers between being an emerging education scholar in Dr. Eva Travers Education Policy course at Swarthmore, to a young school teacher in Colorado, and to an education activist on multiple levels. While Stevens is not suggesting that her path is the only path or the best path, her narrative is powerfully grounded in an intellectual, political and affective spirit that is a tremendous guide to action for my students and anyone who reads this piece.

Ultimately, I hope that this first issue of #CritEdPol compels us all to imagine the “radical possibilities” (Anyon, 2014) that writing and research are, and can be, in policy work; pushing us all to engage policy formation and work to critique, strengthen or transform policy for a greater public good.

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