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#CritEdPol
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INTRODUCTION

Edwin Mayorga & Chanelle Wilson, #CritEdPol Co-Editors

We write in the context of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice, and the wave of tensions tied to the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Economic inequality, antiBlack and antiIndigenous violence, food and housing insecurity, immigrant children in cages, social disconnection and the deterioration of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being signal the effects of this historical moment. For many Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), and other marginalized communities, these dual pandemics have only further brought to light that they have been in states of unwellness for centuries. And yet, Marc Lamont Hill (2020) recently reminded us, “we are still here.” The question is how? How, in the midst of material, social and health conditions that leave BIPOC vulnerable to premature death (Gilmore, 2007, 2017) do people continue to do more than survive (Love, 2019)?

Seeking to further explore this question we at #CritEdPol draw inspiration from the history of struggle and freedom dreaming of Black women and Black womanist radical traditions. The theme for this volume, “beautiful experiments, ” comes from writer and historian Saidiya Hartman (2017, 2019), who describes beautiful experiments as the moments, movements, and legacies of resistance, fugitivity, and worldmaking that are taken up to “refuse the menial existence” scripted for poor Black girls. Not a metaphor but a politics, we extend this politics to marginalized populations writ large to consider how their various experiments either respond to or raise implications for education as a site of struggle. While mainstream education discourse seeks to focus on the intersecting economic, political, and ecological crises that uphold a narrow, fixed victimhood of those deemed “the truly disadvantaged,” we believe the current discourse erases the ways students, families, community activists and agitators have continually imagined and actualized “otherwise” visions for education, reshaping the terrain of struggle for a more just world.

#CritEdPol is an ongoing beautiful experiment. Initiated by Dr. Edwin Mayorga and his undergraduates at Swarthmore College the vision of the working group, and subsequently the journal, was to engage in a practice and politics that troubled what is understood to be legible knowledge and production within critical education policy studies and activism. First, we have sought to organize our editorial board and pool of authors to reflect the various voices involved in the educational policy landscape, including undergraduates, educators, community advocates/activists, and scholars. Organized in this way we have centered the perspectives, knowledge and leadership of those most directly affected by policy, but who are so often marginalized from policy struggle. We disrupt the notion that only policy makers and researchers can be expert policy actors. Our journal also opens up the ways that policy actors can articulate their perspective and create solutions to policy problems by inviting journal contributors to write in formats that include, but go beyond, the traditional academic paper. In sum, we think that the contributions in this volume, each beautiful experiments in their own right, reflect the overarching intentions and politic
of #CritEdPol.

Issue one of this volume opens with “The Erasure of Black Women,” a multimodal creative essay created by mother and daughter team, Tamara Anderson and Maya Anderson. Tamara is a Philadelphia-based educator and activist, and Maya is a second-year student at Susquehanna University. Through a mixture of poetry and expository writing, the Andersons ask, To what do we owe Black women? Everything. Taking on the myth that leadership and progress are the measurements of Black men like Dr. King, Stokely Carmichael, and DuBois the Andersons demonstrate that the erasure of Black women from the historical record is a direct result of patriarchy, white supremacy, and the practice of focusing the spotlight on individuals as opposed to the multitude of organizers that incite social change. Ultimately, their contribution is a call to action saying, No More!

Next, is Dr. Tara Bahl’s essay, “‘Don’t Worry, I Got You. You Can Do This’: A Student-Centered Approach to Reimagining College Access.” Bahl discusses the decline in time high school college counselors have to provide consistent one-on-one counseling to support students with college planning, which produces a counseling process for many students – particularly those in large or under-resourced schools – that is depersonalized and transactional, rather than supportive of student development. Drawing on narrative and ethnographic research, Bahl’s paper explores a unique program that positions young people as paid college access professionals in their schools. Findings show that these students who become Youth College Counselors (YCCs) in this beautiful experiment, make college planning a more student-centered, meaningful experience for advisees. In doing so, YCCs, Bahl argues, resist a dominant narrative of young people, particularly those living in marginalized communities, as objects onto which policy happens, and instead serve as school change actors.

The third contribution is early childhood teacher and graduate student, Emma Butensky’s essay, “Queering Elementary Education: A Queer Curriculum for 4th Grade” where Butensky explores the positioning of queer students and queer curriculum in elementary education. Applying an intersectional mode of analysis that is grounded in queer theories, educational theories, and feminist theories, Butensky first argues that queer subjectivities have (not) been included in schools via curriculum for elementary school children. Given these exclusions from the curriculum, Butensky then interviews educators in New York City to better understand how they have been disrupting this practice of exclusion by incorporating queer topics into their classrooms. Butensky closes their essay by describing how this research was used to create a 23-lesson curriculum for 4th grade teachers that investigates bodies, puberty, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

From queering curriculum we move to fugitive acts of learning in doctoral student Karen Zaino’s philosophical essay, “Fugitive Learning.” This paper draws on educational scholarship that calls for abolitionist and rebellious practices of teaching and learning against the institutional practices of containment, surveillance, and expungement that Black students experience in the schools. Zaino asks, what “fugitive acts of learning” take place in our schools, and what relationship to these practices can teachers adopt so that we might “serve and shield” these spaces of “unruly learning” (Patel, 2016, p. 400)?

This issue closes with Dr. Tabitha Dell’Angelo
and artist Maria DeGenova’s comic, “Down the Rabbit Hole: A Fantastical First Year of Teaching.” Taking an arts-based approach that recognizes performance as both a method of investigation and representation (Worthen, 1998), Dell’Angelo and DeGenova draw on interviews and observations of first year teachers in the northeastern U.S. to construct a comic that is a beautiful visual and scholarly disruption. They communicate the excitement, fears, and competing demands of a beginning teacher, and in so doing present a surreal picture of the affective realities that the teachers expressed through their interviews. In doing so, the authors have provided a wonderful example of an arts-based approach that recognizes performance as both a method of investigation and representation (Worthen, 1998).

We want to highlight how each contribution in this issue pushes us to center students in educational and social change. Co-authors Tamara and Maya Anderson’s powerful highlighting of Black women in herstory, are a beautiful braiding of student and educator perspective. Tara Bahl shares stories of students as change agents; capable, willing, and compensated to inform and transform. Emma Butensky captures the unique work of curriculum construction that transgresses the heteronormative, racist, and exclusive curricula found across the U.S., offering students a more authentic foundation. While Karen Zaino shows students as abolitionists and fugitives; we witness the outcome of the beautiful experiment of allowing students to lead, fostering natural inclinations and action. Then, Dell’Angelo and DeGenova articulate and illustrate the pressures of conforming to a system and the beauty that can be found in letting the students fly. In sum, we hope that the beautiful experiments explored in this volume guide the reader to consider what it means, what it takes, and how we disrupt oppressive practices that have been normalized in education. As we continue forward in the struggle, we invoke resistance, fugitivity, and worldmaking to envision a transformed future. Finally, we want to express our profound appreciation for all who were involved in producing this issue. Our brilliant group of editors were the people who moved Hartman’s notion of beautiful experiments in our call for papers, while reviewers thoughtfully provided contributors feedback to further develop each of these experiments. We want to also extend a special thanks to Pempho Moyo, who single handedly attended to the formatting of the issue. We think that readers will find what Pempho created in putting the contributions together accessible, educational and beautiful as well. Thank you all.

REFERENCES


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THE ERASURE
OF BLACK WOMEN

WORDS BY: TAMARA ANDERSON
HARCUM COLLEGE & LASALLE UNIVERSITY

VISUAL ART AND INSPIRATION BY: MAYA ANDERSON
SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY
ABSTRACT

To what do we owe Black women? Everything. To be Black and female in America means that you are ignored, silenced, and sometimes erased. the very fabric of history would be quite different for all of us without the contributions, tears, blood, and love of Black women. As a result of the intersection of patriarchy and white supremacy, Black women are too often left exhausted, overworked, and left out of the historical narrative. This multi-modal creative work is a call to action to end the erasure of Black women with scholarship, visual art, and poetry.

Keywords: Black women, Black feminism, art, poetry
Introduction

To be very honest with you, to be a woman meant it got done! This kind of organizing is really a woman’s thing... [Women] really carried the movement with men upfront. Many times just holding them up or standing them in position and really doing the work, doing the thinking, getting the job done. Lillie Peoples, a Chicago organizer in the 1980s\(^1\)

This quote epitomizes the legacy and ongoing practice of Black women being the fuel of organizing work that often moves the needle on racial justice. Women are written out of the narrative because the world is taught to remember the men first. In 1962, Malcolm X said, “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected woman in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.” Black history is one filled with movements and actions led by Black women always fighting towards the goal of being granted a seat at the table despite the constant assault on Black lives and bodies. Black leaders believe that education can be the great equalizer, but most of the educational policies, local laws, and overall practices reflect the racial striations marked by each decade starting with enslavement of Africans, and continue to be influenced by a pre-existing colonial mindset. The back and forth battle in school segregation, which is one of the many tendrils of racial inequality in American schools, is just one example. Elise Boddie, a Rutgers University law professor and the founder of The Inclusion Project, which focuses on racial inclusion, believes that “School Segregation also feeds into housing segregation, which is a major source of the racial wealth gap”\(^2\) Regarding the racial wealth gap, rental and housing laws affect Black women more adversely than any other group in the United States. In Matthew Desmond’s ethnography titled, *Evicted*, he writes, “Poor Black men are locked up while poor Black women are locked out.”\(^3\) Although low-income Black women are more likely to attain employment than Black men, their wages are often lower, and children also pose a problem for working mothers when looking for suitable housing. This often leaves Black women and their families in vulnerable sub-par housing, which results in constantly moving from place to place. From physical rape, poverty, stolen children, to the lynching of their men, Black women deserve to be seen and heard. Their contribution to the work should be measured alongside the men. The reality is there is no Martin, Stokely, or Rosa without Ella, no Langston without Zora, no music for the movement without Nina, and more importantly no Blackness without Black women.

During my childhood, I started to notice the erasure of Black women as I compared books to the stories shared with me around my dinner table each night. The stories around the table were filled with the strength and power of the Black women in my family and the people they encountered. My grandmother spoke about the first time she met Mary McLeod Bethune when she was a campfire girl in Chicago. She remembered sitting in the presence of someone who was “somebody” and how that made her feel. Meeting Bethune made

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3. Desmond, M (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*
her feel seen. My mother was not only a science educator for over 30 years, but she also won the local union election and was President of her IEA (Illinois Education Association –NEA) local at the age of 30. She earned her Master’s degree from Northwestern University by the age of 22. Despite all of these accomplishments, when we moved from my grandmother’s house, my mother was met with rejection after rejection for a rental because she was a single Black mother with a child. Even a favor from a police officer that my grandmother worked with resulted in her renting from a slum lord. Housing for Black women in 1983 looked very much like 2020. An award-winning educator being subject to poor housing was evidence that education did not lessen racism.

While in high school, my aunt was approached by recruiters from Kirkland College (Hamilton College) and was given a full scholarship to attend. When she shared the good news with her mother, she was aghast because the money was coming from Harris Bank. At the time, Harris Bank was considered a racist establishment that did not open accounts for Black families in Chicago. This was 1971. When my aunt arrived at the bank she was met with enthusiasm by the white men who helped her sign her financial papers because they were all alumni of Hamilton College. When she arrived on campus in Clinton, New York far away from Chicago, she took advantage of every opportunity. She served as an intern on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C., attended the University of Heidelberg and Schiller College in Germany for three years, and after graduation she received a full scholarship to the University of Wisconsin Law School in Madison. My aunt received an invitation to the inauguration of President Jimmy Carter in 1977 simply because she wrote a letter requesting one. Similar to my mother, when my aunt moved out of my grandmother’s house she also rented a sub-par apartment in a very violent neighborhood due to what was available to single Black women.

The legacy of Black women in our family working, being engaged in the community and being seen made the narrative that we did not deserve to be there simply fade into the background. But, in school, I only heard stories filled with men and their accomplishments. In school, it appeared as if women were not a part of the narrative. My teachers in elementary and middle school were Black and female, and yet, they were not a part of the stories they were sharing. At home and church, my examples were the opposite. My grandmother was born in Mississippi and when she was 8 an uncle in a drunken stupor tried to suffocate her while she slept. Her father with the help of her cousin sent her the next day to join her mother in Chicago.

Figure 1 - Happy Birthday Mom
My great-grandmother worked as a domestic for a wealthy white family. My grandmother sang gospel music for a local radio station as a teen. When she became an adult she started as a crossing guard and later was the Administrative Assistant to the District Commander at the Chicago Police Department in the 2nd District, and nothing happened without her say. Aldermen (Chicago City Council Members) came to my house for dinner and we had a special invitation to Harold Washington’s Mayoral Inauguration, Chicago’s first Black mayor. She was also a pastor at the Temple for Metaphysical Teachings for over 35 years. Yet, it was a white woman from her church that made it possible for her to purchase her first home in 1968 because she could not get a mortgage. I saw Black women making sure that work happened and taking care of family and their communities, but I never heard them mentioned in my educational settings or my books. So here I am floundering to find myself in the Blackness of my stories. I am struggling to see the truth that is often hidden in plain sight and to renegotiate the work of Black women that often prop men up so that they can be remembered.

As an organizer, I am constantly reminded of my importance but also how quickly I can be relegated to the back. As one of the core organizers for the Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Philadelphia, I have seen firsthand how the ideas of the men are transformed by the work of women. All of the work for the week of action was planned and executed by the Racial Justice Organizing Committee in 2017 and it quickly morphed into being led by majority Black females, despite the umbrella organization, the Caucus of Working Educators, being predominately white and female. And much of the participation of the umbrella organization was adjacent or invisible from the core work. The week in Philadelphia was inspired by a Black Lives Matter day of action organized in Seattle in the fall of 2016 and now it has become the National Black Lives Matter at School movement, which continues today. And yet, the work that I have put in is constantly being silenced or erased mostly by myself because I believe in training and supporting new leaders. When the work first started, only four people were on the initial call, and I was the only female, the only Black female, the only one who proposed and uplifted the 13 guiding principles, which to this very day are the national and local pillars that center and ground the work. But, I question if that should be included in the narrative because as women, we are taught to stand in the back and as Black women we are often sent to the sidelines even when our voice rings the loudest screaming, no more.

The original organizers of #BlackLivesMatter are three Black women, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. After the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013, these women created an organizing platform. In 2014, after the murder of Michael Brown protests transformed Ferguson, Missouri into Ground Zero for change. In 2016, the Black Lives Matter Global Network was created along with 13 guiding principles, one being Black Women, which is the label provided to ensure that part of the work is dedicated to the centering of Black female voices. When the work started here in Philadelphia, it was imperative to highlight and center Black Lives Matter in schools and communities using the 13 guiding principles that together create the blueprint

for a better society. Yet, many people have to still be reminded of the names of the original organizers, and the 13 guiding principles are often overlooked or never mentioned. I attribute this to the fact that we do not always practice the Black Women principle, which states, “We build a space that affirms Black women and is free from sexism, misogyny, and environments in which men are centered.” It is vital that my daughter and other Black girls can see themselves in the work and that they are included when we shout, all Black Lives Matter!

The Invisibility of Ella Baker

Ella Baker understood that laws, structures, and institutions had to change to correct injustice and oppression, but part of the process had to involve oppressed people, ordinary people, infusing new meanings into the concept of democracy and finding their own individual and collective power to determine their lives and shape the direction of history.

If strength and power emanate from Black women then it began with Ella Baker. Ella’s grandmother was whipped because she refused to marry the man that her slave master chose for her. This started the legacy of rebelliousness that was evident in her work with Dr. Luther King, Jr and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Ella became the first Black female president of the NAACP New York branch, and yet her history continues to be overshadowed by King and Carmichael. She trained a young Rosa Parks in 1940, and in 1958 she trained leaders in organizing, resistance, and planned protests. “Radical change for Ella Baker was about a persistent and protracted process of discourse, debate, consensus, reflection, and struggle” and she believed in her spirit and practice that “Strong people don’t need strong leaders.”

Her mouth had been trained from birth to say no
Her ears had been trained to listen and seek out the truth
Her heart had been trained to include those she organized in the process
With only $800 she grew a few students into SNCC
They sat
They protested
They paved the way for Civil Rights to come
She trained their mouths, their ears, and their hearts to do the work
And a movement was born
Yet, she is silenced and erased by the men, in the shared stories
Her invisibility is so palpable that we have to be reminded that she even existed
Ella was the voice behind King and the fuel within Stokely
She believed in People Power
The power behind those who had nothing giving them the strength to fight for what they always deserved
And today more young Black girls are able to find themselves in the historical record and achieve greatness because WE refuse to continue the legacy of erasure

The Adultification of Black Girls

Schools can either reinforce dominant ideas that are present in society, or they can actively work to develop skill sets among young people to be critical participants in the process of developing the society they want to be a part of and live in.8

The adultification of Black girls is another way to erase them. It diminishes their childhood and the natural milestones necessary for positive development by thrusting them violently into adulthood. Black girls comprise 16% of the student population at public schools. They are often victimized and suffer racial and gender bias from their home and school environment.9 Many of them cry out and are often not believed or they seldom encounter compassionate adults. According to Monique W. Morris, the author of Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in School states, “They also described being repeatedly victimized in community and in schools, and having that victimization either rendered secondary to the pain and victimization of their male counterparts or not believed in their spaces of learning and in their homes.”10 Some of the mistreatment, negligence, and abuse can be countered by the presence of more African-American educators and staff, but it can also be helped by Black girls being allowed to grow into women safely and without encountering harm or toxicity.

Black women are more likely to be raped, murdered by a partner, or sexually abused as a child. There exists a “Sex Abuse to Prison Pipeline” for Black girls that no one speaks of.11 According to the report, “girls involved in Oregon’s juvenile justice system, for example, 93% had experienced sexual or physical abuse; 76% had experienced at least one incident of sexual abuse by the age of 13.”

An additional study published in 2017 by Georgetown Law concluded that Black girls are assumed to require less help and assistance than White girls. Hypersexual myths and stereotypes like “Jezebel” and some traditional African clothing which bared more skin as a result of the climate justified enslavement and rape during global colonization and American enslavement. “Perhaps she remembers her great-great-grandmother who wanted to protest but only rolled her eyes and willed herself not to scream when the white man mounted her from behind.”12 During slavery, mulattoes were often sold into prostitution for generous sums due to the hypersexualized views that surrounded them. Those who were of a lighter hue and born free often became “willing” concubines to wealthy white Southerners. This arrangement was called placage and was a formal agreement where the white man would provide financially for the woman and her children in exchange for sex. These feelings and myths surrounding sex and Black womanhood continue today with the myth that “Black women are sexually immoral”13 while White women are often considered the pinnacle of sexual purity and decency. Sex trafficking and sexual assault result in missing Black girls and no one seems to care.

I have students who have lost female siblings and cousins only to have them found a year or more later either dead or scarred from ongoing sexual abuse and trafficking. My daughter spoke often of the girls in her high school who confided in her about sexual assault. This is not simply a new problem; it is one that continues to be pervasive as a result of white supremacy, toxic masculinity, patriarchy, and misogyny. Yet it also remains invisible and hidden in plain sight simply because it involves Black girls, teens, and women. This is why the work of Rosa Parks as a sexual assault investigator must be told so that we can stop and bring all of these stories to the light to protect our Black girls and women from the darkness.

The Truth of Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was a sexual assault investigator for the NAACP and this is the work that she should also be known for. On September 3, 1944, Recy Taylor was gang-raped by six white men who also lived in Abbeville Henry County, Alabama. Death threats followed after a grand jury dismissed the case. Recy was afraid to leave home, and her story reached the ears of the NAACP and they sent their best sexual assault investigator, a young Rosa Parks. She created the “Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor.” None of the men were ever charged despite her ability to identify each one. Another similar rape case went to court a year later and it was also dismissed. While investigating the case Mrs. Parks was physically thrown from the house of the local sheriff while trying to ask questions. Recy Taylor received a formal apology nearly 60 years later in 2011 from the Governor of Alabama.

“The apology…is all Taylor really wanted.” She died six years later. The history of Rosa Parks’ activism includes much more than refusing to take a seat on a bus, or being the field secretary of the NAACP. She brought to light the rape of Black women in the South who were often silenced and never received justice. The sexual assault of Black women continues to be shoved into the darkness time and time again.


On the Backs of Women- Damage

Hit, Strike, Water
Hit, Strike, Water
Each time we stand with elbows locked
Stand together.
Hit, Strike, Water
Black women ride the bus to work and toil for White women
Their “other” families
Losing theirs
Hit, Strike, Water
Children, Teen girls being arrested and beaten
Mothers losing children with each hit and strike
Wombs damaged
Backs broke
Bruises
Lynching
Death
Hit, Strike, Water
It did not start with Rosa
Claudette
Emmett
Black mothers and dead children
“I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby”\textsuperscript{16}
They remember and refuse to ride the bus sparking a movement
So they walked
New laws - change
2020 Black children still murdered
The truth remained hidden
Rewritten, repackaged, and retold
Now the story has been corrected
Go and empower other Black girls to stand up instead of sitting down.

\textsuperscript{16} Till, Mamie
Zora Neale Hurston was unapologetically Black before it was a catchphrase. She lived her life in a manner that defied rules and conventions. She was simultaneously celebrated and silenced often by other Black male writers. She was a part of the Harlem Renaissance where Black writers, artists, and music were celebrated and uplifted into the mainstream culture. The NAACP (National Advancement for Colored Peoples), the National Urban League, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids (Pullman Porters) were also birthed during this time. Names like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Alan Locke were literary experts in Black life. The argument between her and Langston Hughes over the authorship of *Mule Bone* was legendary and never assuaged, but it was Richard Wright who cut Zora the deepest. He wrote this about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “The minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh.” Zora was also not a fan of Wright’s character Bigger Thomas either. She believed like James Baldwin that Wright had created a character based on racial stereotypes as opposed to “robust and nuanced characters.” Protagonists that illustrated the pain and complexities of Black life including love and love loss mired in racism and white supremacy. *The Street* by Ann Petry and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* feature a Black female protagonist and lens, and are both set in a community where either Black people are in charge or adversely affected by whiteness or a combination of both.


Zora lied on her application for Morgan College and said that she we 16 when she was actually 26 to complete her high school diploma. This was her only option after her father remarried a very violent women who thrust her into leaving school and working menial jobs just to take care of herself until she end up in Baltimore at the age 26. She then attended Howard University and earned her associate’s degree and co-founded their famous campus newspaper, *The Hilltop*. By 1927, Zora graduated from Barnard College with her Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology, which she earned in three years thanks to a scholarship. Before 1930, Zora was an award-winning writer and after the publication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* she was nearly penniless. Wright’s book sold over 200,000 copies while Hurston’s book quickly went out of print, erased. When she died in 1960 money had to be raised to have a funeral and bury her in an unmarked grave. In 1973, it was a woman, another Black writer — Alice Walker — who resurrected her words and provided a marker for her remains. Zora was not only a writer of fiction and drama, but she also contributed greatly to Black anthropological study with her collections of interviews and artifacts of Black culture that are housed in the Library of Congress. She was a public critic of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and her interview of the last enslaved person who was brought over from Africa was not published in 1927 and quickly shelved. It did not see the light of day for 90 years. Silenced. Zora had a sharp intellect combined with an even sharper tongue. She always led and finished with truth — unapologetically.

Unapologetically Black

I want to “jump at da sun” as my mother told me to

I want my place to be where I choose and when I like

I want my complexion and womanhood to demand its own space and value

I do not need respectability because I have nothing to be ashamed of

Living in a Black town taught me that one-way integration is ridiculous

My teachers, the mayor, and the storekeeper were Black like me

That is what I have always known and I have no reason to celebrate or seek whiteness

I will be Black, female, unapologetic, fierce, loud-talking, and honest

Always and forever
Mississippi Goddam

The Audacity of Nina

“Liberals who claimed to believe in racial justice and yet also embraced American exceptionalism and empire held irreconcilable commitments”

Imani Perry

Before the documentary What Happened, Miss Simone was released on Netflix in 2015; we only had Nina Simone’s music and some news clips about how she was “difficult,” “angry,” and “worldly.” But she was all of those and so much more. She provided the music for the work and the movement. Once she found her “I am not non-violent” voice, she provided the necessary lyrics for what no Black person dared to utter aloud.

Nina Simone was born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina in 1933. She was a piano prodigy by the age of 3. Her mother was a church minister and Eunice went with her to revivals and churches to play piano, she never sang. She started studying classical music by traveling to the other side of the tracks to take lessons with a white woman who saw her play at one of the church revivals. Her childhood began to be filled with practice sessions that lasted six to eight hours each day, and she started to feel isolated from the other children her age. This started the constant loneliness that followed her into adulthood. After high school graduation, she applied to the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. Her application was denied and her pathway to being a famous classical musician was dashed. Two days before her death, Curtis Institute awarded her an honorary diploma, attempting to close the loop on the fact that her rejection was racially motivated – a symbolic but empty gesture.

After the rejection, all of the money that was donated for her to attend school dried up leaving her entire family in a state of financial distress. She always expected to be the first Black classical piano player to play at Carnegie Hall, never the performer that she became. That disappointment becomes more evident later.

She eventually got a summer gig in Atlantic City where she started playing in local bars for money. To hide this secular life from her mother, she transformed into Nina Simone, inspired by a nickname given to her by a boyfriend and the actress Simone Signoret. Her renditions of tunes like “Porgy and Bess” and “My Baby Just Cares for Me” made her a household name. In the former, she refused to sing the lyrics in the stereotypical Black vernacular and humanized the love story by infusing it with pain and sorrow. During this time is when she met her husband Andy Stroud, a former cop who retired and dedicated himself to managing Nina’s career. This brought them both financial comforts, but it also started a cycle of abuse. Their daughter Lisa remembers once when they were driving and Andy reached across her tiny body and slapped her mother in the face. His ring caught on her eyebrow and caused it to bleed. This was one of many beatings. Not to mention she was constantly feeling exhausted or overworked due to a relentless tour schedule that kept her away from her family. The loneliness continued. Once Nina received a note from a fan while they were out dancing and Andy responded violently. He not only beat her, but also put a gun to her head, tied her up, and raped her.

22% of Black women have been raped and 40%


will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.\textsuperscript{22} Black girls and women are constantly viewed as somehow deserving of abuse or it is erased in plain sight. Everyone knows and is helpless or silenced to do anything about it so it continues. The High Priestess of Soul who walked into every room like royalty was having a battle with her very soul and heart when it came to her volatile relationship with her husband. She sought happiness despite all of the public accolades.

Soon she met a group of people who provided her some refuge in the storm, some peace. Lorraine Hansberry, the playwright, essayist, and agitator became one of her dearest friends and her daughter’s godmother. She taught Nina the nuances and politics of what it meant to be Black in America. Their sisterhood and friendship also included James Baldwin and Langston Hughes, an A-list of Black contemporaries of her time. They encouraged her to get engaged and to use her voice as a platform.

\begin{quote}
It was more than I could take, and I sat struck dumb in my den like St. Paul on the road to Damascus: all the truths that I had denied to myself for so long rose up and slapped my face. The bombing of the little girls in Alabama and the murder of Medgar Evers were like the final pieces of a jigsaw that made no sense until you had fitted the whole thing together. I suddenly realized what it was to be black in America in 1963, but it wasn’t an intellectual connection of the type, Lorraine [Hansberry] had been repeating to me over and over --- it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination. In church language, the Truth entered into me and I ‘came through’\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Nina was angry and needed to say something. She poured all of that energy into the writing of Mississippi Goddam, which changed her life forever. She had seen enough and there was no turning back. Dick Gregory, the comedian and civil rights activist, Goddam, which changed her life forever. She had seen enough and there was no turning back. Dick Gregory, the comedian and civil rights activist, stated “Not one black man would dare say Mississippi Goddam,” and Miss Simone paid the price professionally, spiritually, and emotionally. Her voice technically changed after singing Mississippi Goddamn, and never returned to its original octave range. \textit{Brown Baby}, \textit{Pirate Jenny}, \textit{Sinnerman}, \textit{Young Gifted and Black}, and \textit{Mr. Backlash} quickly replaced the traditional protest songs that Nina always thought didn’t fully represent the energy of the Civil Rights Movement. And they soon became the songs for the Black Power Movement. Her concerts and engagements started to dwindle and her records stopped being played on the radio. She never went back to the music that made her a mainstream commercial hit.

“I’ll tell you what freedom is to me, no fear,” Nina Simone.

\textsuperscript{22} Finoh, M. & Sankofa J. 2019). \textit{The legal system has failed Black girls, women, and non-binary survivors of violence}. ACLU
\textsuperscript{23} Gwin, M. (2013). \textit{Remembering Medgar Evers: Writing the long Civil Rights Movement}
Nina shouted even when she was quiet.

She was beaten and still wept when she lost Evers, Lorraine, King, and Jimmie

It broke her into pieces and yet she still gave us the gift and power of her music that shook the truth loose

“Sinner man where you gonna go to” when there is nowhere left to hide.

Shouting “Mississippi Goddamn!” As the radio stations refused to play

It became the rallying cry at Selma

Her music made us brave enough to keep on fighting

“Young Gifted and Black” inspired by Lorraine gave us reason to hold our head high

There was always a light and darkness in her tone each time she opened her mouth and her fingers touched the keys

Miss Simone transformed all of us
This image was drawn to illuminate the beauty and ease of Blackness. One woman is standing in a pose as if she is taking a picture and the other is leaning into her friend to demonstrate closeness. A necessary relationship is a sisterhood that exists in a world that loves Black women the least. “Black women know what it means to love ourselves in a world that hates us. We know what it means to do a lot with very little, to ‘make a dollar out of fifteen cents,’ as it were.”

Black women are also more apt to be evicted at a higher rate than any other ethnicity.” Being the heads of households and taking care of entire families often falls on the shoulders of women leaving them exhausted and with toxic levels of stress. Even Rosa Parks spoke about how important it was for her husband to be recognized in his work at the NAACP despite her being more in the limelight to create balance in the household. Ella Baker often had heated arguments with King about the direction of the work, which pushed her to solely work with the students. Nina Simone’s daughter describes the often volatile relationship between her parents and when she finally left him she fled the country leaving her daughter behind. Zora had many husbands and society ridiculed her for such unwomanly behavior. My grandparents separated when my mother was 4. I never met my father, and my daughter has very few memories, if any, of hers. This practice of putting men first, being forced to consider their feelings as tantamount, or simply being abandoned by them continue to perpetuate the misogyny fueled by white oppression and gender racism. It continues to silence and suffocate Black women or even worse makes them appear angry or bitter, instead of being celebrated and shown kindness, or just simply understood. It continues to simply be understood the practice of Black women being the backbone of society, the community, the home, and the family without any balance or anyone or any system to hold them up.
Who are the wolves and sheep in reality? The wolves in our reality are the conservatives, the presidents, the elite class, and the officials who hold more power than the working class. Their actions are to ensure that those who are lower than them stay in their place to maintain their power over them. They live easy and they make sure that their lifestyle is impossible for the sheep to obtain. The sheep are the people, the masses of society that follow under their leaders’ rule. They are oppressed, subjected, and stuck in their place, and don’t fight or protest. The sheep who protest and act against the wolves are the revolutionaries who take off their masks. Most of those without masks are depicted as black women because of their strength and because every fight starts and succeeds through the efforts of black women, who played major roles in fighting for civil rights for Blacks from the 60s to now. They promote and practice empowerment for women of all races. They tell the other sheep, “We are strong and resilient against oppression and push through it.” revolutionary is born...

Black women can radiate your entire spirit with a single word or gesture. And yet, there are times that I feel lost in the mediocrity and bullshit. I forget our collective beauty and get mired in the dirt and grime that comes with life. The dirt and grime that comes with the loss of a loved one and the death of a relationship. The dirt and grime that comes from an ungrateful child trying to find their way. The dirt and grime that comes from the rules of society. I forget that like a diamond covered in coal, there is still beauty there. Beauty that is rock solid and never changing. It can never be diminished, and it will never be hidden for long.

She can finally escape from the wolves.

Figure 7 - Grosses Beautes
Celebration

It is time to reclaim my Blackness and my womanhood without shame or animosity. It is time to make space for Black girls in our classrooms, homes, and public spaces. They need to know that they matter. #SayHerName is just as important as every unarmed Black boy or man that is murdered. When work is being done in our neighborhoods and schools, and you see Black women getting lost, speak up for them. Celebrate their presence and their ingenuity. This is a call for balance and healing, and not for arguments over who is the most oppressed and why. Black women can be visible in the historical context when we teach the truth without leaning into patriarchy. Use the lessons of Rosa, Ella, Zora, and Nina to share the possibility of what can be. Allow each Black girl the opportunity to grow into her fullest potential without ever being erased…

Also remember Ida B. Wells, the Stolen Girls of 1963, 4 Little Girls, Fannie Lou Hamer, Georgia Gilmore and all of the Black women that we continue to erase and silence

So celebrate Black Girl! Shout with glee and joy! Run in place and run to the water! Surround yourself with beauty so that you can always remember how amazing you are in the face of adversity and hopelessness. Embrace and hug your inner Black Girl and let her come out and play. The women we have become need her to survive. Stop telling folks, “Those women don’t like me especially other black women.” Leave that shared hate in someone else’s cup because it never had a place with us. And whoever put that on your step sold you a bad penny and it is time to bury it for good. Black women know nothing but love because they have birthed all of our pain. And they continue to live and breathe through it, which means shadiness and pettiness are for another hue. Do not let it live in your village or circle. Reach for each other and hug every Black woman and girl tightly and never let go.

REFERENCES


### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tamara Anderson is a parent, educator, a founding steering committee members of the National Black Lives Matter Week of Action at Schools, a founding member of the Racial Justice Organizing Committee, a founding member of Melanated Educators Collective, a core organizer of Philly-Black Lives Matter Week at Schools, Opt-Out Philly, a previous steering committee member of the WE Caucus, and an antiracism trainer.

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DON'T WORRY
I GOT YOU
YOU CAN DO THIS
A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO REIMAGINING COLLEGE ACCESS

TARA BAHL
STELLA AND CHARLES GUTTMAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (CUNY)
ABSTRACT

As high school college counselor caseloads increase, they have less time for consistent one-on-one counseling to support students with college planning. Thus, for many students – particularly those in large or under-resourced schools – the process is depersonalized, focused on simply distributing information. Drawing on narrative and ethnographic research, this paper explores a unique program that positions young people as paid college access professionals in their schools. Findings show that these students – Youth College Counselors (YCC) – make college planning a more student-centered, meaningful experience. Strategies YCCs engage with to support peers are examined to shine a light on how YCCs use their unique position inside schools to rethink college planning. YCCs resist a dominant narrative of young people, particularly those who live in marginalized communities, as objects onto which policy happens, and instead serve as school change actors. Findings suggest that high schools must create space in policy and practice to thoughtfully position students as agents of school change.

Keywords: college access, youth leadership, peer education, K-12 education
Introduction

Limited access to one-on-one counseling in high school can act as a significant barrier on the road to college (Avery, Howell, and Page, 2014; Woods & Domina, 2014). However, due to swelling counselor caseloads, many students – particularly those enrolled in large or under-resourced public high schools – are left with insufficient counseling support. To address this problem, researchers and policymakers often recommend things like decreased counselor caseloads or a distributed guidance model (Bryan et al., 2011; Nauer et al., 2013). Others advocate for the development of a college-going culture (McKillip et al., 2013).

A major problem with interventions along this vein is that they treat students as objects onto which policy happens. Change actors are school administrators, teachers, or outside organizations. Rarely are students included in school change conversations. Rarer, still, do schools position students as change agents toward reimagining college access.

Drawing on narrative, ethnographic, and survey research, this study explores one such re-imagination. Youth Leadership for College Access is a program that prepares cohorts of students to work as paid college access professionals in their high schools. After intensive summer training, Youth College Counselors (YCCs) work to support peers during the college application process through counseling and workshops. By examining this work from the perspective of YCCs and the peers with whom they serve, I will show how one cohort of YCCs rethink college planning in their schools as a student-centered, meaningful experience, using their unique position inside schools as an effective tool toward school change. Findings underscore how YCCs transform a barrier created by inefficient school policy (lack of sufficient college counseling) into an opportunity to support the college-going goals of their peers.

Framing the Problem

Public high schools in the U.S. traditionally rely on parents and college counselors to guide students during the college planning process (Lindsey & Gable, 2013; Venegas & Hallett, 2008). However, for many – like one-third of students enrolled in U.S. post-secondary institutions whose parents did not attend college – parents cannot always provide necessary technical support, because they do not have the firsthand experience (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Kirst & Venenzia, 2004; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). In these cases, an oftentimes-overworked counselor acts as the primary source of support during the college application process (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009).

As more first-time college freshman apply to college in the U.S. than ever before, the job of a high school college counselor has intensified in volume and responsibilities. Most public high schools do not staff a college access professional; someone whose sole job is college advising and enrollment (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018; McDonough, 2005). Instead, a school counselor is tasked this duty. While the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a counselor caseload of no more than 250, the U.S. Department of Education reports this average in public schools to be 470 (US Dept. of Education, 2016). In large high schools with over 2,000 students, caseloads only increase. Meanwhile, a recent National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) survey reveals that public high school counselors spend
a mere 21 percent of their professional time on college counseling (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018).

Tasks that take time away from college guidance work include activities like course scheduling, personal counseling, academic testing, and teaching. Counselors are expected to do more than college counseling, forced to juggle various other school-based roles. This constant juggling can make one-on-one college counseling particularly challenging (Gast, 2016; Perna & Kurban, 2013).

The value of one-on-one work within the context of effective college counseling and planning has been amply documented in research (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Perna et. al., 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013; Woods & Domina, 2014). However, between student caseloads well over the 250 ASCA recommendation and other school-based responsibilities, many counselors have no choice but to triage, like an overwhelmed ER doctor. In this scenario, they are only able to wholly serve those high-performing students who are a shoe-in for college, or students at-risk of not graduating (Kimura-Walsh, et. al., 2009; Perna et. al., 2008). This leaves limited time for quality one-on-one counseling to address the unique needs of the rest of the junior and senior classes (Elliott et. al., 2015; Gast, 2016; Owens et. al., 2011).

In the absence of consistent one-on-one counseling, counselors often rely on tools like checklists, email announcements, or brochures rife with complex information to distribute college information and deadlines to students (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Gast, 2016; Hill, 2008). Gast (2016) refers to this as “mass outreach strategies” (p. 15). These strategies treat college planning as a one-size-fits-all process, rather than a meaningful and student-centered experience. If a student does receive one-on-one time with a counselor, it is brief. This usually involves reviewing a checklist to generate a college list based on generic information about the student that the counselor gleans from a report card. And, perhaps a hurried chat before they move on to the next student in their caseload.

A substantial consequence of this approach is that it privileges information over the process of using it. College planning is reduced to information, treated as bankable currency, rather than a meaningful experience (Brown et al., 2016; Chajet & Stoneman-Bell, 2009; Hooker & Brand, 2010). Simply possessing college knowledge – like how to complete an application or generate a college list – is not enough. Students must use it within the context of their personal lives. This makes college planning a student-centered experience, rather than a one-size-fits-all checklist of generic steps. In most cases, neglecting this is not an intentional oversight by counselors, but rather the only option they have in the absence of necessary resources to support their work (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Holland, 2015).

When college planning does not hold meaning for students, they cannot strategically use dense information in order to make perceptive and savvy choices about their futures. And, this can have dire consequences. Lori Chajet and Sierra Stoneman-Bell (2008/2009) typify this:

[many] students blindly follow a rote college application process rather than taking control of it themselves…many end up at colleges that do not meet their needs or expectations; others, after realizing that they never fully understood their financial aid packages, are unable to make their first payment and never begin;
and still others, despite their desire to attend, never complete the application process (p. 41). College admissions information is irrelevant if students are unable to contextualize and use it. When college planning is not meaningful, students can make ill-informed college decisions, or never attend at all.

Of course, students often look to other sources of college planning support. This may be especially true if a college counselor is not easily accessible. The role of peers and peer mentoring programs in college planning has been highlighted in research from a number of perspectives (Castleman & Page, 2013; Elliott et. al., 2015; Holland, 2011; Marciano, 2016; Perez, 2010; Tierney & Venegas, 2006; Weiss et. al., 2017), and is particularly relevant given the focus of this study. Most of this research finds that peers have a strong impact on college-going aspirations and decisions of young people, particularly those who are underrepresented in college like students whose parents did not attend college, students of color, low-income students, and immigrant or undocumented students.

For instance, Andrew Sokatach’s (2006) study that uses the National Education Longitudinal Study database found, even when controlling for other variables, friend college-going plans were the single best predictor of 4-year college enrollment for low-income students of color. Additionally, through interviews of 49 predominately Black college students, Nicole E. Holland (2011) found that peers influenced student preparation for, and decisions about, college by way of themes like positive influence, knowledge development related to college planning, and academic and social support. Studies along the vein of Sokatach (2006) and Holland (2011) emphasize the influence peers can have on college planning and related activities.

However, this influence may not always be beneficial. Elliott et. al. (2015) took a qualitative approach to look at social networks and decision-making strategies of male students of color within the context of college planning. The authors focused on peers and family as college information sources. They found that family and peers did play a central role of encouragement for study participants when planning for college. They also found that, with the exception of a few cases, most of the college-related information participants received from peers was inconsistent and superficial. Thus, while peers can have an important impact on college planning and decisions, students do not always have access to peers who are well-informed and reliable. These findings point to the need for school practices, programs, or policies that thoughtfully and intentionally connect students with knowledgeable peers during the college application process.

**Research Site: Youth Leadership for College Access**

Youth Leadership for College Access is a program that prepares young people to engage their peers in college planning as paid college access professionals. They work in local schools or community-based organizations (CBO) across New York City. Through comprehensive training and support, Youth College Counselors (YCC) develop skills and knowledge that they use to not only improve their own educational outcomes, but also toward widening college options for peers. In order to become a YCC, students complete an application and are interviewed by school/CBO staff. In most cases, current YCCs are involved in the interview and decision-making process. While each site uses slightly different hiring criteria, there is not an ideal student “type”.

30
Not all YCCs are “A”, hyper-involved students. Some are. Others are what many YCCs refer to as “average students” – students who are not involved in many afterschool clubs or sports, and do not receive exceptional grades.

The bulk of their training happens during the summer. YCCs are required to attend a three-week, intensive Summer Institute. Topics covered are not only related to college planning, but also counseling and communication skills as well as data tracking. After Summer Institute, YCCs participate in a number of daylong professional development trainings throughout the year. All YCC training and support is provided by a not-for-profit organization that coordinates the program, among other college-related programming, in New York City. The program has existed, in some form, since 2011.

YCCs predominantly provide one-on-one and small group counseling for peers that covers a range of college planning activities, like: registering for the SATs, creating well-balanced college lists, completing a college application, personal counseling, and financial aid planning, among many other things. They also design and facilitate workshops, plan events and college trips, complete data tracking to monitor and document their work, and create and maintain a college office/space in their school. Alongside these tangible aspects of the job, YCCs serve as a leader in their schools, acting as credible sources of all things college-related.

Schools and CBOs adopt different strategies to help YCCs reach students (such as required workshops for Freshmen in some schools). However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and program specifics are guided by the overall culture of the individual school or CBO.

YCCs receive minimum-wage for hours worked. Their schedules are collaboratively designed with adult supervisors who oversee the work they complete.

Twelve sites participated in the 2013-2014 Youth Leadership for College Access program. Given that some were multi-school campuses, YCCs were placed in a total of nineteen high schools, as well as three CBOs with a college access focus. Schools and CBOs were located in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens. 63 YCCs between the ages of 15 and 19 attended Summer Institute training. They were:

- 62% female and 38% male
- 58% living non-English only speaking households
- 28% Latino; 26% African-American; 15% Asian; 19% bi-racial; 12% other
- 36% non-U.S. born
- 75% had a father whose highest educational attainment was a GED/HS diploma or less (or unknown); 60% had a mother with similar educational attainment (or unknown)

**Conceptual Framework: Adaptive Expertise**

YCCs embrace an exceptional position in their schools. While they are students planning for college themselves, they are also trained college access specialists who serve as an essential source of guidance and support for peers. This unique position interrupts the traditionally well-defined line between staff and student in schools.

This interruption also plays out in the particularities of their work, as it requires that they bring together different discourses, skills, and experiences within the context of college planning. In order to support peers, YCCs use their expertise and knowledge about college planning
and counseling. They also rely on firsthand, personal experiences related to being a high school student, as well as the individualized relationships they forge with friends and peers. They bring all of this into their everyday work. This is a markedly different approach to college planning than the information-heavy standard in many under-resourced schools; one that relies on generic “mass outreach strategies” with an over-worked college counselor at the helm (Gast, 2016, p. 15). The unique space YCCs occupy, and the varied forms of expertise they bring to their work, is a useful framework to examine their work.

Research on knowledge and expertise differentiates between routine and adaptive (VanLehn, 1989). Routine expertise requires solving recognizable problems within a specific domain quickly and accurately, based on familiarity and a specific body of knowledge. It “reflects the ability to complete a familiar task efficiently” (Kirshner & Geil, 2010, p. 6). Expertise that moves beyond routine familiarity speaks to adaptive expertise. Adaptive expertise, in comparison, relies on “flexible, innovative, and creative competencies” toward solving a problem, and the ability to adapt to new situations or problems as they arise (Hatano & Oura, 2003, p. 28). Adaptive expertise often requires sampling from different domains or discourses toward finding a dynamic solution to a problem.

An illustrative example of this distinction is between two chefs. One enacts routine expertise by following steps in a recipe, whereas the other enacts adaptive expertise to creatively and spontaneously use unfamiliar ingredients and cooking tools toward creating something new (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999). Both chefs have access to cooking knowledge and tools. The difference lies in how they make use of this knowledge, and their ability to sample from different skills and sets of knowledge to create something novel and different.

The analytic lens of adaptive expertise can be used to examine YCC work, and the unusual position they assume in their schools. While they are high school students, they are also trained college planning experts. They move among these identities fluidly, usually occupying them simultaneously. Furthermore, YCCs make use of skills, knowledge, and expertise from these different vantage points, bringing them together within the unique context of their work. I will argue, and show, that this distinctive identity YCCs assume in their schools is where potential lives – potential to rethink college planning as a more meaningful experience than the one-size-fits-all approach that most adult counselors practice in their schools.

Methods and Analytic Approach

The goal of this study is to examine the role YCCs play in reimagining college planning as a meaningful, student-centered experience, specifically by examining the strategies they use when working with peers. To access a dynamic understanding of YCC work from their perspectives, YCCs from three sites (N=21) engaged in one written narrative activity. This invited them to write about a time they worked with a peer(s) to illustrate problems they face when college planning, as well as how YCCs support them. All twenty-one narratives were included in an NVivo database, entered as individual data. I additionally conducted: 3 YCC focus groups (N=21), 3 YCC peer focus groups (N=20), observation at 9 YCC sites, and a YCC exit survey (N=52) at the end of the academic year. Focus groups were transcribed, included in the NVivo database. Observation notes and exit survey results were also included in the
NVivo database. Data collection took place from September 2013 through June 2014.

The analytic process was grounded by YCC voices and experiences, by way of the narrative activity. Focusing on the “storied nature of discourse”, I analyzed themes and structures in narratives using narrative inquiry, more specifically with plot analysis (Daiute, 2014, p. 11). People use narrative and storytelling in order to do things, thus it “mediates experience, knowledge, learning, and social change” (Daiute, 2014, p. 4). Narrative inquiry can engage participants to share and reflect on their experiences in relation to diverse circumstances and relationships in their lives and experiences.

Plot analysis examines plot as the guiding structure of a narrative, underscoring key elements like: characters, problem, complicating actions, high point, resolution strategies, coda, narrator stance (Daiute, 2014). To organize YCC narratives into a plot structure, I used a plot analysis template (Appendix A). Once each of the twenty-one narratives were organized into a plot analysis template, I looked for issues addressed in the plot high points, as well as other key structures of the plots, such as main characters, complicating actions, and resolution. From these analyses, master narratives and plots were identified to pull out themes YCCs value in their work, and how these themes were operationalized in this work.

Plot analysis of the narrative activity identified how YCCs understood their work and peers. This line of analysis also revealed what happened when YCCs worked with their peers, and what mattered to them during these interactions (Daiute, 2014). I was able to hone in on why the particular stories YCCs chose to tell held meaning to them. By examining the high points and resolutions in these stories, the strategies YCCs used to support peers surfaced.

After identifying plots and themes in YCC narrative activities, as well as resolutions strategies, I used them to code transcripts of focus groups, observation notes, and exit survey data. For instance, “relating to peers” emerged as a master narrative in YCC narratives related to strategies they used to support peers. I then revisited focus group transcripts, observation notes, and the exit survey to see if, and how, this resolution strategy emerged in these different data sources. Therefore, the other data sources worked to shine a light on dominant plots and themes that emerged from the YCC narrative activity, triangulating findings (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

The work YCCs did, and how they executed this work, looks different than the traditional college counseling that adults delivered in their schools. They valued the consistent one-on-one counseling they provided peers, and viewed this work as filling a gap in their schools. They also made use of a number of different strategies when working with peers.

Many of these strategies were unique to YCC work with peers, and they understood this work as providing something fundamentally different than adult counselors in their schools.

Value of One-on-One Counseling

The bulk of YCC everyday work with peers falls within three configurations: one-on-one counseling, small group counseling, and facilitating workshops. When YCCs were asked to write about an experience that exemplifies their work, all three configurations were represented. However, they overwhelmingly chose to feature one-on-one counseling. Table 1 illustrates YCC work configurations represented in
the narrative activity (N=21).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Configuration of YCC work, presented in narrative activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total # of narratives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on-on-one with a peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting or planning a workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with peers in a small group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During focus groups with YCCs, they frequently highlighted the one-on-one work they did with peers. In nearly all of their schools, adult counselors were limited in number and time. However, sustained one-on-one counseling is often the most effective approach to college counseling (Corwin et al., 2007; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Woods & Domina, 2014). This dilemma was directly addressed by YCCs. One YCC, Ferah, emphasized the value of one-on-one counseling she provided her peers:

A lot of students that I worked with personally didn’t have an idea of where they wanted to go [to college] at all, and I had to kind of start from basics with them and go from there… it opened their minds a little bit. I feel like if we weren’t able to have those one-on-ones, they still wouldn’t know where they were going to go or what they were going to do.

Many YCC written narratives indicated that they spent multiple one-on-one counseling sessions with a particular peer. As Table 1 suggests, YCCs understood the one-on-one work that they did with students as particularly important and meaningful for their peers, given the overwhelming emphasis. One YCC, Rishi, underscored this when he explained,

Most students in this school, they’re dependent on others in terms of getting help with college applications and other stuff. So, they really need [someone to] sit next to them and help them and ask them, “What’s next, what’s next”. It’s a lot of repetition, too. College or guidance counselors can’t do that, and they’ll just tell the students, “Go home and go to this website.” But most of the students are reluctant to do that at home. They’re the kind of students that you need to push and keep telling them to do that. So, [YCCs] do this repetition job a lot…

Rishi talked about YCC one-on-one counseling as an effective strategy toward helping students in his school. He explained that most students need one-on-one college counseling, because they are “the kind of students that you need to push”. But, according to Rishi, counselors “can’t do” this sustained one-on-one work, due to time constraints and workload that later came up in the focus group. YCCs were willing, and able, to “do this repetition job” with peers. Rishi connected a specific strategy (YCC one-on-one counseling) as a method toward successfully supporting the needs of his peers. In other words, he identified a college planning need in his school, and positioned YCC one-on-one counseling as a valuable strategy to address this need.

**From Themes to Resolution Strategies**

In an exit survey administered at the end of the school year, YCCs were asked to describe one thing of which they were most proud during their year of work. They most frequently reported that helping a peer(s) was what made them proud. Table
In most cases, however, YCCs did not go into great detail about the nature of this help. Broad statements were used, like: “being able to help students with [the] college process”; “helping out my peers when they need it the most”; or, “being able to help numerous students”. YCCs did not describe how, exactly, they helped or supported their peers, or the strategies used.

Plot analysis of the twenty-one YCC written narratives moves beyond this general theme of “helping peers”. With this method of analysis, I could focus on the resolution strategies YCCs made use of when working with peers. Table 3 documents these strategies, aggregated into six categories. Plot analysis helped to clarify how this dominant theme of “helping peers” was operationalized in YCC everyday work.

Nearly all narratives used technical college knowledge at least once (N=24). This makes sense given the college access context of YCC work. Examples in narratives were things like: “I helped her come up with a complete (college list”; or, “I advised him about his post-secondary options”. This type of resolution strategy was often signaled by verbs like “advise”, “explain”, or “describe”.

However, YCCs relied on a number of complementary resolution strategies, all documented in Table 3. These complementary strategies functioned to make college planning personal and meaningful for peers. They also were identified during focus groups and in observation notes as strategies YCCs used that were different than a one-size-fits-all approach often implemented by adult counselors in their schools.

### Table 2
**What makes YCCs most proud, exit survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping peers</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping peers complete a college application</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning workshops or school events</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth or development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping peers with SAT registration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
**Resolution strategies enacted by YCCs, presented in narrative activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution strategy</th>
<th># of resolution strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use technical or college knowledge</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in a personal conversation using communication or counseling skills</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide comfort, emotional support, or assurance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate to the peer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a personal sacrifice</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help from an adult or other YCC</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average number of resolution strategies per narrative: 3.4

**Resolution strategy: Engage in personal conversation.**

Many YCCs made use of communication and counseling skills to engage peers in a personal conversation (N=17). YCC Pooja used this strategy in her narrative, explaining, “We had a nice conversation of what college looks at, and we talked
about how there’s still time to change his path”. This conversational strategy differs from using college knowledge, because it involves mutual engagement and interaction, rather than simply telling or giving their peers the answer to a question.

Personal conversation as a resolution strategy surfaced during focus groups frequently, particularly as a strategy that differs from the way adults often help students in their schools. YCC Malina underscored this difference during a focus group: “Students need someone to talk to… because they have some problem that they need to get over with before they even start the application. If there are no YCCs, the counselors are just going to tell them ‘Oh, these are the schools you need to apply to’ and that’s it.” Rather than just “telling” students the answer to college-related questions or problems, Malina emphasized that YCCs served as “someone to talk to” for their peers. This conversational element helped YCCs tackle different problems their peers experienced.

Often, YCCs made themselves available to peers for personal conversations outside of school, through Facebook, text messaging, and other virtual supports. During a focus group, YCC Genesis illustrated this idea, explaining, “Sometimes people would hit me up on Facebook… they had access to me.” Another YCC, Ferah, jumped in, adding, “Yeah, late night text messages also at two o’clock in the morning.” When I asked Ferah if she responded to these late-night texts, she noted, “Yeah, you have to. It’s part of the job.” Ferah saw it as her “job” to be available to peers, to talk with and provide support, even if it was after normal school hours. Personal conversations, in school and out of school, were used by YCCs as a distinct strategy toward helping peers work through issues or dilemmas while college planning.


YCC narratives also revealed how they used comfort or emotional support as a resolution strategy when working with peers (N=12). This was signaled in narratives by phrases like: “I introduced myself to make the students feel comfortable”; “I smiled and made him comfortable”; “I sat down and I tried to calm him down a little”; or, “I looked [her] in the eye and sympathized [with her]”.

Akosua’s narrative typifies this strategy of emotional support and comfort. She wrote about a time she helped a peer who not only had concerns about college, but was also battling Lupus. She wrote (italics included for emphasis):

Last school year, I had the opportunity to use my counseling skills with a Senior who was going through so much personally. As a YCC, you are attentive to the student, look them in the eye, and sympathize with the student. She had Lupus and felt like her SAT scores and GPA will not get her into college. My responsibility was to revive her self-confidence, make her smile and see the positive side of her situation. Because of my cheerful, optimistic, and sensitive personality, I was able to make her happy, help her apply to colleges, and also be there for her whenever she needed someone to talk to. The role of a YCC is to relate to student situations and try as much to be positive else it destroys the confidence and esteem of a student.

Akosua provided comfort to her peer in a number
of ways. She was “attentive” and “sympathize[d]”, understanding it as her “responsibility to revive her self-confidence, make her smile” and make her “happy”. Akosua was “there for her whenever she needed someone to talk to”, acting as a source of support during this peer’s time of need. She noted that ignoring these elements of comfort and emotional support for a peer while college planning can “destroy the confidence and esteem of a student”.

When talking with YCC peers during focus groups, this strategy of emotional and moral support surfaced repeatedly. For instance, when I asked about her experiences with YCCs, one peer, Denise, explained:

The moral support was huge…the college process was stressful, and sometimes when I get too stressed, I cry…It was safe to know that even though I was stressing out, they knew exactly what I was going through. It’s easier for them to help me go through and offer me simpler ways to get around it and say, ‘It’s okay. Everything is going to work out…

For Denise, the “moral support” that YCCs provided functioned as a strategy to ease her “stressing out”; it made her feel “safe”.


The excerpt from a peer focus group above, with Denise, hints at another resolution strategy that YCCs made use of when working with peers: relatability. Written narratives revealed how they used and fostered their peer-to-peer connection as an approach to help peers (N=10). As Denise put it, YCCs “knew exactly what I was going through”. During another peer focus group, one student drove this point home, explaining, “The YCCs are students at the school. They take the same exact classes that we do. They understand what we’re going through a lot more than a teacher.”

YCCs used phrases in their narratives like: “I put myself in his shoes”; “I tried to be a peer that understands his situation”; “I explained that I related to his situation”; or, “I share[d] my personal story with her”. YCCs emphasized that they “relate”, “understand”, or “sympathize with” their peers, or a problem they were experiencing, in order to help them. They underscored commonality, and also enacted relatability in written narratives by using an inclusive “we” or “us” when talking with peers.

Often, relating with a peer also meant connecting with them as friends. One manner in which YCCs did this was by bringing laughter and humor to the often-stressful college planning process. During a focus group, YCC Arielis located the importance of laughter and humor they brought to college planning, especially in contrast to adults. She explained that, “Adults are so serious sometimes. Whenever [peers] approach me and I’m explaining something, I kind of make it funny. You need to make it funny and engaging for the student”. In their narratives, YCCs often called upon humor – joking or laughing with one another – as a strategy to connect with their peers on a friendly, personal level.

Language was one final way that YCCs related with peers. I observed one YCC, José, working with peers in his college office. He moved from speaking English with one peer, to quickly using Spanish in order to effectively communicate with another. In his school, over twenty percent of the study body were English Language Learners at the time. During a focus group, this idea surfaced, as YCC
Malina explained, “we are a very diverse group. We have Mandarin, Korean, we have Spanish. [Adult counselors] speak Korean and Chinese, but José right here he can speak Spanish. Those Spanish-speaking students, José can help them out”.

Resolution strategy: Making a Personal Sacrifice
Lastly, YCCs sometimes made a personal sacrifice as a strategy to help. Personal sacrifices enacted in narratives included: paying for a peer’s SAT registration out-of-pocket (N=1); skipping class to facilitate a college workshop (N=1); skipping a prior obligation after school (N=3); or, seeking out Spanish tutoring to better communicate with a peer (N=1). Six of the twenty-one YCC narratives enacted personal sacrifice as a strategy to help peers work through dilemmas at least once.

Sampling from Different Resolution Strategies
Plot analysis of the twenty-one written narratives revealed that, on average, YCCs used 3.4 resolution strategies per narrative (see Table 3). They sampled from different strategies when helping peers resolve a problem or dilemma faced while college planning. This sampling from different resolution strategies similarly surfaced during my observations of YCCs. Below is an excerpt from observation notes:

José walks among the students, checking in and asking if they need help. He seems aware of each student’s keystroke. One raises her hand and says she’s “ready to submit” her application. José seems suspicious an asks, “Did you go over the application and review it”? Her eyes widen, and she shakes her head no, uncertainly. He shakes his head, but smiling, and walks over to her. He hovers over her seat to review the application with her. A sixth student arrives at the college corner and says to José, in Spanish, that she has an appointment with him. He responds in Spanish, noting it’s her first visit to the college office. He motions for her to take a seat at an empty computer.

José continues to review the student’s application. “You see, this why you have to go over the application”. He points to the screen at a question that his peer forgot to answer. Both laugh. “You always have to go over this stuff. It’s just like when you’re in class – you never look over your homework and stuff before you turn it in. I know you”. They laugh again. He shows her how to correct her mistake, then reviews the next steps in her process. He asks if she’s clear on next steps…The student nods her head. She looks overwhelmed. José must feel it too, because before sending her to the counselor for an application fee waiver, he pats her shoulder. He says, “Don’t worry, I got you. You can do this. You’re almost there”. Then he turns to the student waiting for her appointment, and begins speaking to her in Spanish (YCC observation notes).

YCC José literally moved between different peers in need of help, and sampled from different resolution strategies. In the scenario described above, José:

1. Used college knowledge and technical expertise to help his peer identify a mistake she made on her college application.
2. Used peer relatability and personal relationship, laughing with her and joking as friends do. He noted that he “knows her”, reminding her to review things because, when they are in classes together, she frequently forgets to review her homework.
3. Used comfort and assurance to calm her
nerves, patting her shoulder and promises, “Don’t worry, I got you. You can do this. You’re almost there”.

4. Used language flexibly, moving between speaking English and Spanish.

Nearly all narratives used college knowledge and technical information as a resolution strategy, just as José did in order to help his peer complete an application online. However, it was usually complimented by additional strategies. This suggests that in order to help their peers, YCCs did not simply tell them what to do, or provide a quick answer to a familiar problem or issue. Instead, they made use of a variety of strategies depending on the particular problem or issue their peer was experiencing.

**Discussion**

YCCs provided, and valued, consistent one-on-one counseling for peers, and during these sessions the strategies they made use of to support peers moved beyond simply providing college-related information. They made college planning a meaningful, student-centered experience for peers by using multiple resolution strategies to support them during interactions, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. The resolution strategies used were very much contingent on the particular peer with whom they were working, and the problem(s) they presented.

This sampling from various resolution strategies is adaptive expertise in action. YCCs flexibly and creatively navigated among different discourses, strategies, and skills to address an oftentimes evolving issue their peer was experiencing. YCCs and their peers indicated that adult counselors frequently relied on answering a question or giving them information. This signals routine expertise – solving recognizable types of problems quickly and accurately based on familiarity or a specific body of knowledge. In contrast, YCCs drew on a variety of different resolution strategies. As one YCC wrote in his narrative, “being a YCC is more than just telling students what to do, because I had to make each experience personal”. YCCs used adaptive expertise to make college planning for peers in their school “personal”, pivoting among various strategies depending on their individual problems and needs.

Most resolution strategies, and the use of adaptive expertise, relied on the unique position that YCCs hold in their schools. This unique position afforded them the ability to sample from knowledge, information, and counseling skills they learned during formal college access training, while also making use of their insider peer expertise. They counseled peers on college-related matters as well as personal issues, talking and reaching out to them as they would with friends or family. While they almost always relied on technical college planning information, YCCs supplemented this with additional strategies that drew on their firsthand knowledge of being a high school student in their schools. This is what YCCs valued in their everyday interactions with peers. Strategies like relating to peers or engaging in personal conversations complemented the use of technical college information, and provided a more holistic college planning experience for peers that is fundamentally different than a traditional (adult-driven) counseling model in their schools.

YCCs live in the same communities as their peers, speak the same languages, and walk the same hallways. However, they received a level of training and deep understanding about college planning – as well as counseling and communication skills
that their peers have not experienced. YCCs navigated practitioner knowledge and expertise related to college planning alongside an intimate understanding of their peers and the communities in which they live. This is an extraordinary position that no adult college counselor can ever fully replicate. During a peer focus group one student, Mario, underscored this unique position YCCs held in his school, and the value that came with it. He explained:

YCCs are students at the school. They take the same exact classes that we do. They understand what we’re going through a lot more than a teacher. Some teachers they just need to get this done. [Our college counselor] just needs us to hand in the applications so she has what we have done. The YCCs were that bridge between an adult, with all the information necessary to make sure we are successful in the process, but also making sure that, as students, we knew we had people that understood what we’re going through; we had people that cared about us.

Implications for Practice and Policy

In May 2014, I was conducting an observation at a school. While most seniors had already made their post-secondary choices, YCCs were still hard at work with peers who were preparing to take the SAT the following morning. One YCC, Obi, was talking with a peer, giving him some final words of advice: “Be there at 7:30am! I’m gonna call and wake your ass up – I don’t care if you don’t like mornings”. They both laughed, and Obi gave his peer a pat on the shoulder for encouragement before sending him on his way. He turned to me and said, “You know, we set a record this year. 90% of students took their SATs, and that’s a record for our school. It’s never been that high. Never. And it’s because of us. WE’RE ALL GONNA GO TO COLLEGE!” Obi put his hands over his head and shook his hips, doing a kind of celebratory dance.

Obi was excited. And, he was proud. He was a junior, returning for a second year of YCC work the following year, so he was not explicitly including himself in that “we” quite yet. What Obi was speaking to, though, is the idea that his work – the work of YCCs – was not just about helping themselves, or individual peers, with college planning. It was about getting them all to college, or to whatever post-secondary goal they envisioned. It is about transforming the fabric of their schools by rethinking college as a meaningful, viable option, and positioning students as change agents in this transformation.

Policymakers and researchers often recommend that schools create a college-going culture to foster a school environment that encourages the option of college for all (College Board, 2006; Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McKillip et al., 2013). For instance, The College Board suggests a variety of small-scale and large-scale ideas to grow a college-going culture (College Board). These range from hanging college posters around the school, to curricular interventions like Advanced Placement courses or partnering with college-focused organizations (College Board, 2006, p. 8-11). Other researchers suggest forging partnerships with communities in which students live to promote college access and readiness (Bryan et al., 2013; Hines et al., 2014).

A fundamental problem with these common interventions, as I see it, is that they tend to treat young people as objects onto which change happens. The business of creating a college-going
culture – of rethinking how to support students with college planning – usually prompts schools to adopt different strategies, ideas, and services. Students are an output, or a growing number in a counselor caseload.

This study shines a light on an initiative that locates young people at the center of school change. YCCs live college planning alongside their peers. They have access to ways of working with peers that adults simply will never have, and bring together these strategies alongside formal college access information to provide a college planning experience that is unique and student-centered. A YCC may use text messages or Facebook to contact peers late at night when they are working on college applications, while another might relate to a peer who is having a tough time finding scholarships to fund college goals because they, too, are experiencing that very challenge. These are examples of strategies that YCCs believe are important in supporting their peers. They are strategies that adult counselors cannot make use of, sometimes due to school rules, and other times because of the simple fact that they are not students. By examining the work that YCCs do, from their own perspectives and experiences, we can learn how they are able to redefine college access work that happens in schools as a meaningful, student-centered experience, rather than a barrier or roadblock to young people’s goals for the future. Instead of waiting for someone else to make school change, YCCs are taking matters into their own hands to create it.

Findings from this study suggest that schools must ensure that students are provided with college access professionals whose sole job is to support students with college planning. An overworked counselor juggling other school-based responsibilities cannot provide students with effective, ongoing one-on-one counseling. YCCs are one approach to achieving this, however it is not the only one. Additionally, schools and policymakers must intentionally carve out space and opportunity for young people to be heard – a space that values their experiences, their lives, and their capacity to be dynamic agents of change. Within the context of college access, I hope this research shows that when we do this purposefully and thoughtfully, we no longer need to worry about filling a gap in college access, because we disrupt it altogether.

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### Appendix A

#### Example of a plot analytic template and approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Working one-on-one with a student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>1. first-person narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. student/peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating action</td>
<td>As a YCC one experience that has been the most impactful to me was being able to work with a student that not a lot of many others would have been likely to help this is the initiating action in the narrative because it indicates the main problem that the YCC is identifying, and is the lead-in for the many complicating actions that will follow to compound/clarify this main problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating action(s)</td>
<td>He was not one of the best students to keep track of The main issue that I had with this student was that he did not want to apply to any type of colleges and also he just was not as serious about the college process. And on top of that he had some serious family issues that did not allow him to have the power to use his family documents there are five complicating actions, indicating the intensity and complicated nature of this student’s situation as it pertains to college access and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High point (turning point, climax)</td>
<td>As a YCC it was my job to be willing to help even though he did not want it This is the turning point in this narrative, because the YCC moves from describing the complicated student problem, to describing how he will begin to address it within the context of his job as YCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution strategies</td>
<td>it was all about sitting down with him and being able to talk to him and tell him the truths about college and all the opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending/Resolution</td>
<td>I spent most of my working hours working with this one student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator stance</td>
<td>his story just hit me wanting me to do anything I could to get him to the next step in his life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*text in *italics* indicates my own annotation, and text in bold indicates my own emphasis.*
QUEERING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
A QUEER CURRICULUM FOR 4TH GRADE

EMMA BUTENSKY
KIMBERLY WILLIAMS BROWN
VASSAR COLLEGE
ABSTRACT

This project explores the positioning of queer students and queer curriculum in schools with a specific focus on elementary education. Using intersectionality as a guiding framework along with queer theories, educational theories, and feminist theories, this project examines and critiques how queer subjectivities have (not) been included in schools via curriculum for elementary school children. In an effort to better understand how educators have been successfully incorporating queer topics into their classrooms, this study uses qualitative research methods, specifically semi-structured interviews with teachers in New York City. The findings from this study have been used to create a 23-lesson curriculum for 4th grade teachers that investigates bodies, puberty, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, the curriculum uses an intersectional lens to explore how various identities such as race, gender, ability, sexuality, and religion intersect to inform understandings of privilege and discrimination.

Keywords: queer education, intersectionality, K-5 curriculum, qualitative research, queer subjectivities
Introduction

As a little girl, I loved school. I loved my teachers; I loved my classmates; I loved math; I loved reading. I especially loved reading. Every night before bed, I would choose a stack of books and my mother would read each one to me. My favorite book was *Leo the Late Bloomer* by Robert Kraus, which was about a lion named Leo who took a little longer than the other animals to do new things. My four-year-old self found a connection to this lion (I, too, was a late bloomer), and my mother read it to me so many times that I came to know the story by heart. As I grew up, I found many more books with characters to whom I could relate. Laura from *Little House on the Prairie*, Gertie from *All of a Kind Family*, Ida from *The Secret School*, and Junie B. Jones all mirrored some of my character traits while helping me envision what my life would have been like in a different time period, or, in the case of Junie B. Jones, if I ever got in trouble (I didn’t).

I didn’t have to look far beyond children’s literature to find more of that sought-after relatability. As a White, middle-class, U.S.-born, English speaking, able-bodied, cisgender girl with married, heterosexual parents, most of the lessons I encountered in school revolved around people like me or were from the perspective of people like me. In contrast to the experiences of many people with less privileged identities, school made me feel included and valued. It was made clear to me, both implicitly and explicitly, that I belonged.

Except for one thing.

I am a lesbian.

And nowhere in my education was I taught about being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or any other queer\(^1\) identity. Not even in sex education, which I took every year from 4th through 8th grade and then again in 11th, did we talk about what it meant for two people with the same genitalia to have sex or what protection from STIs might be needed.

Many students who are similarly or otherwise marginalized face this issue; they attend school everyday, but aren’t seen. Children of color often don’t see people like themselves represented in the books they read, the history they learn, or the cultural messages they are fed. Immigrant youth are often tasked with learning a new language while being expected to succeed in a school system that doesn’t acknowledge their capabilities. This raises the question, if public schools are supposed to educate all people, then why do their curricula exclude so many identities?

The research presented throughout this paper examines the absence of queer children from curriculum. Because queer children sit at multiple intersections of identity including, but not limited to, immigrant youth, youth of color, and youth with disabilities, this paper will address how educators may be inclusive with their curricula. The theme for this call, “beautiful experiments,” captures the unique work of creating a curriculum for elementary students that transgresses the heteronormative, racist, and exclusive curriculum found across the U.S. This paper pushes our understanding of the identities of the students we serve as multifaceted,

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1. What does queer mean? While there are many definitions of the term queer and endless identity categories which fall into it, most people think of it as a term for someone who falls along the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) spectrum. However, I will be using the term queer instead of LGBT because it is more inclusive and can refer to identities that are not represented in LGBT. Another way one can define a queer person is someone who is not straight and cisgender.
beautifully imperfect, and intersectional.

My first year teaching gave me the opportunity to witness the exclusion of certain identities from curricula as it was being created. Stepping outside the confines of a liberal arts college into the world of contracts, W-4s, and co-workers was a wake-up call to say the least. I entered my first job post college with grand ideas about how my students should be treated, how gender should be enacted, and how race should be considered in my preschool classroom. Unfortunately, I was met with resistance and outright anger from my co-workers and bosses. Despite their good intentions and mainstream liberalism, their preferred classroom practices reinforced problematic ideas about gender and race. I was admonished for reading *Julian is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love, a Stonewall Book Award winner about a young boy who loves mermaids. I was told not to read the board book *C is for Consent* by Eleanor Morrison, a simple story about a child who attends a party with his family--his parents make sure their relatives ask for the child’s consent before hugging him or giving him a kiss on the cheek. One of my bosses was angered when I asked the music teacher to sing, “Hello, kids! Hello, teachers!” instead of “Hello, girls! Hello, boys!” because I didn’t want to reinforce a gender binary where it doesn’t exist. Perhaps most egregious, when I respectfully pointed out that my co-worker’s five senses chart lacked people of color, she told me that it didn’t matter because she “did diversity last month.”

Experiences like these were frustrating and upsetting, but they have not discouraged me. More than ever, I see how important it is to do the work of making education more inclusive. I’ve had the pleasure of interviewing teachers who seek to bring social justice into their schools. During our conversations, I was struck by the enthusiasm and commitment that these educators have for this work. The curriculum I constructed would not have been possible without their support, advice, and experiences to guide me. I hope this paper will further our shared vision for a more inclusive future for education.

The curriculum I created is made up of 23 lessons and was designed for New York City 4th graders. I chose NYC because it is my hometown, and I feel better able to write a curriculum for students living in my own community than for students living elsewhere; however, my hope is that, with the right modifications, educators can adapt it for 4th graders around the country. I chose 4th grade because, as I will demonstrate, there is a dearth of suitable queer resources for elementary school students. Here, I focused on children in later elementary school because I wanted to go in depth into topics which may be too complex for younger students.

Though I am currently studying early childhood education, which does not include 4th grade, the work I did to create this project has given me the knowledge and confidence to tackle topics of identity with even younger children. Since queer topics are often only discussed with middle and high schoolers, if at all, my hope is that, as teachers read my research, they will become emboldened to do this work with preschoolers and elementary school students, too.

**Literature Review**

This literature review explores the ways in which queer identities have been addressed, or not addressed, in the classroom. More specifically, I consider the question, *What have queer studies for elementary school children looked like so
Using an interdisciplinary approach—a combination of queer theories (Duggan’s (2002) definition of homonormativity), feminist theories (Crenshaw’s (1991) definition of intersectionality), and educational theories—I analyze existing queer curricula and queer-themed books available for children.

Queer Curricula

Feminist legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), implores us to consider identities as part of complex matrices—multifaceted and intersectional—that influence who we are. The theory of intersectionality posits that every individual sits at multiple vectors of identity, including gender, sex, sexuality, race, and religion, to name a few. These multiple identities, some of which may hold privilege and some of which may not, intersect to shape one’s experience in the world. Crenshaw (1991) speaks to the intersections of race and gender in police violence against African American women to demonstrate how misleading it can be to only consider one aspect of identity at a time (pp. 1-3). Although Crenshaw’s writing is not about queerness, the theory of intersectionality can and should be applied to all identities because it allows us to see the unique, and often overlooked, experiences of individuals with multiply-marginalized identities. When writing my curriculum, it was vital to put forth an intersectional view of queerness because if not, I would be falsely presenting the queer community as a homogenous group with a shared experience. By utilizing an intersectional framework in the content and development of my curriculum, my goal was to represent queer identities as diverse, complex, and multi-dimensional.

In preparing to create my own curriculum, I first searched for ones that already existed. I was overwhelmingly disappointed by the results. One resource, The Gay and Lesbian Student Education Network (GLSEN), is a popular site for teachers who want to make their classrooms LGBTQ-inclusive (I use the term LGBTQ here because it is the term used on their website). Educators can find lessons suited to their particular grade-level. While some of the lessons for middle and high schoolers address queer topics explicitly via discussions on LGBTQ history, the ones for elementary schoolers do not. Instead, they teach respect, diversity, and valuing individuality through texts such as The Boy with the Rainbow Heart by William Mason and Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes (neither of which are about LGBTQ identities). Although these are important values to teach, GLSEN’s so-called LGBTQ-inclusive lesson plans are not deep nor intersectional; thus, they cannot do the work of really turning schools into spaces where queerness, with all of its intersections, is welcomed and supported. I knew that my curriculum had to take this work a few steps further.

Despite its mediocre, elementary-level lesson plans, GLSEN provides the public with vital data on the current positioning of LGBTQ youth in schools. In The 2015 National School Climate Survey by GLSEN, the statistics show the unfortunate reality that many students who identify as LGBTQ or who don’t conform to gender norms hear the words “gay” and “fag” used negatively, receive physical and verbal harassment, and do not feel safe at school (Kosciw et al., 2015, pp. xvi- xvii). However, students whose schools teach LGBTQ-inclusive curricula are less likely to hear homophobic remarks, miss school, feel unsafe, or feel disconnected from the school community (Kosciw et al., 2015, p. xx).
Bishop and Atlas (2015) have investigated the extent to which LGBT families are being recognized in school curricula. They recruited 116 elementary school psychologists from New York State and asked them to fill out a questionnaire about their curriculum, policies, and practices regarding inclusive education (p. 770-771). In their findings, Bishop and Atlas (2015) reported the following:

Elementary students were taught about . . . gay/lesbian families in only 23.0% of school districts. Only 23.3% of districts used an LGBT-inclusive curriculum (either informal or formal) that gives attention to LGBT students, individuals, and issues. Of those districts, 88.9% reported that they use an informal curriculum (unofficial lessons taught to students) and 11.1% reported that they use a formal curriculum (planned program of objectives, content, and resources offered by the school). (p. 773)

This study demonstrates that New York’s elementary schools are overwhelmingly excluding queer families, people, and history from their curricula. When such topics are being included, they are most often taught through informal discussions rather than carefully planned and prepared lessons. It is important to note that schools in high-income areas were more likely than those in low-income areas to incorporate LGBT lessons and anti-discrimination policies into the school climate (Bishop & Atlas, 2015, p. 779). While not surprising, this is regrettable considering that communities of all socioeconomic levels contain people who are queer, and all students benefit from learning about people with identities different from their own.

The marginalization of students who aren’t cis, straight, middle or upper class, documented, English-speaking, White, Christian, and/or able-bodied is purposful. All of these types of discrimination and marginalization work together to uphold a singular view of the ideal American student. Teaching a queer curriculum that addresses multiple identities is one step towards disrupting this discriminatory vision.

*Queer Literature for Children*

Duggan (2002) defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179). She describes homonormativity as a gay politics that is complicit in dominant discourses and systems of oppression. Examples can include advocating for same-sex marriage without a critical look at the oppressive institution of marriage (Duggan, 2002, p. 189), seeking the inclusion of queer people in the military without examining the implications of the military itself, or failing to include the voices of trans individuals and people of color. In other words, homonormativity can often look similarly to heteronormativity, just with White, cis, monogamous, financially-secure, gay men as the new standard of normal.

Using Duggan’s (2002) definition of homonormativity, Lester (2014) analyzed 68 queer-themed children’s books for indicators of homonormativity. Through her research, Lester (2014) found that all of these 68 books included homonormative themes, including the problematization of feminine boys (p. 248) and the upholding of the gender binary (p. 251). While these picture books attempted to showcase diversity,
they instead reproduced traditional notions of families as monogamous and centered on children (Lester, 2014, p. 253) while also upholding White supremacist and classist ideals (Lester, 2014, p. 255).

Like Lester (2014), I also analyzed queer-themed children’s books to consider how expansive and inclusive these texts were and what messages they conveyed about queerness. Although many of the texts that I explored have been marketed as LGBTQ-friendly, I argue that they instead re-inscribe a homonormative, gender rigid, and non-intersectional framework. While they are friendly towards some queer people, namely those who are otherwise privileged by race and gender, they ultimately perpetuate harmful stereotypes while excluding people with identities that are not “queer dominant.”

In Heather Has Two Mommies, Lesléa Newman (2016) aims to normalize families with same-sex parents by showing that Heather is just a regular girl with two arms and two legs (an ableist portrayal) who loves to do regular family activities with her parents. When she starts school, Heather wonders if she is the only one without a dad. The book ends with a lesson from her teacher to the class about how all families are different and special. While very radical when it was written, and still considered radical in some areas, this book does not portray queerness outside of a White, cisgender, able-bodied, and homonuclear context (a context in which the nuclear family, even one that involves same-sex parents, is privileged over less common family structures). Furthermore, normalization is not the goal for all queer people or families. I do not seek to belittle the queer families for whom this book is a “beacon” of representation (GLSEN), nor do I disagree with the book’s lesson, but like Lester (2014), I want to push back against the one-dimensional way that queerness is established in literature for young children.

Books like I Am Jazz teach children about what it means to be transgender, yet do so by perpetuating gender stereotypes. In I Am Jazz, Herthel and Jennings (2014) position the main character, Jazz, as a stereotypical girl in order to justify her girlness once it is revealed that she is trans. Jazz also informs the reader, “I have a girl brain but a boy body. This is called transgender. I was born this way!” (Herthel & Jennings, 2014). Although it can be necessary to provide a definition of “transgender” for children, distinguishing between girl versus boy bodies and brains reinforces the gender binary and positions certain bodies and ways of thinking or being as tied to a particular gender. A common homonormative political tactic is to advocate for queer inclusion by justifying queer identities as being inherent to a person from birth. When Herthel & Jennings (2014) say that Jazz was just “born this way,” they are seeking to legitimize her experience by showing that her transness is an immutable characteristic. This implies that if being trans were a choice, then acceptance would not be necessary. Absent is a call for society to transform its views of gender outside of gender stereotypes and the binary.

On the other hand, They, She, He, Me: Free to Be! (Gonzalez, 2017) uses beautiful illustrations to show how people of a variety of different appearances can use a variety of different pronouns. This book also comes with an explanation of pronoun usage and seeks to empower children to understand how they feel on the inside. Gonzalez has other queer-affirming books such as The Gender Wheel: A Story about Bodies and Gender for Every Body (2017) and The Gender Now Activity Book (2011). Most of Gonzalez’s literature portrays
children of color, especially Chicanx children, using an intersectional approach to affirm children’s identities from a diverse set of backgrounds.

As books are one way in which children learn about the world, the types of people and politics represented in them can shape their viewpoints. When children’s literature only portrays certain types of people and families, it teaches children that some identities are more important than others. Books like *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *I Am Jazz* are failing to embrace people of color, low-income communities, unapologetically feminine boys and masculine girls, people who challenge the gender binary, and families existing outside of the homonuclear context; this robs readers of an opportunity to learn about queer people in all their heterogeneity. For queer children or children with queer parents/guardians, it can be further marginalizing not to see their intersectional identities represented in current children’s literature.

*Queer Studies in Education*

After new policies were enacted in California mandating the curricular inclusion of LGBT people’s contributions to history, Donahue (2014) studied the impact of these mandates as they related to lesson plans. In particular, he examined how Harvey Milk was situated as a hero of LGBT history: an uncritical and shallow attempt at inclusion (pp. 36-37). Through his analysis of 11 lessons on Harvey Milk, Donahue (2014) uncovered the ways in which this singular hero’s story presented queerness as tragic, White, male, and seeking normalization (p. 39). Not only does such a restricted presentation of queerness exclude the many contributions of queer people of color and queer women, to name a few excluded identities, but it also ignores the realities of homophobia and heteronormativity as it existed in Milk’s day and now. Nevertheless, Donahue (2014) argues that when teachers are handed queer curricula they don’t like, they can still use it as an opportunity to develop their students’ critical thinking skills, thus transforming the lessons into more suitable learning opportunities (p. 39).

Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) also have studied the potential for queer-themed curricula to disrupt heteronormativity, particularly through children’s literature (pp. 807-808). Like Donahue (2014), they are interested in “queer politics that acknowledges gender and sexual fluidity” (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p. 811). Through interviews, Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) examined how elementary school teachers in Australia and Ontario incorporated queer-themed lessons into their curricula (p. 812). One participant, Janice, planned her queer-themed lessons as responses to the inevitable questions and homophobic bullying occurring in her classroom each year (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p. 816). As a result, this teacher was able to disrupt ideas about colors, toys, and hair as belonging to a certain gender or sexuality through in-class discussions, which then allowed her to incorporate picture books that addressed these topics, too (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p. 816). While the issues queer people face extend far beyond the individual comments made by schoolyard bullies into a system built on the subjugation of marginalized communities, it is still vital for teachers to actively challenge homophobic comments and misconceptions, as Janice does daily in her classroom.

The literature in this review has underscored the unfortunate circumstance that, on the few occasions
when queerness is taught in schools, it is often presented through the lens of homonormativity, with the main focus on the normalization of White, cis, middle-class queers. My hope is that one day, queer studies will be seamlessly woven into elementary schools, queer children’s books will include queer characters of a variety of different identities, and anti-bullying rules will exist alongside policies for systemic change both within education and outside of it. In the meantime, the curriculum I have written and the work being undertaken by many educators each day is beginning the process of disrupting the heteronormative, homonormative, racist, classist, and otherwise exclusive education system as it exists today.

Methodology

To further investigate the ways in which elementary schools explore topics of identity and social justice, I interviewed seven educators teaching at two private schools and one charter school in New York City. I used ethnographic, qualitative methods to collect data because these were the most effective way for me to analyze the culture and practices behind supporting queerness in education.

Creswell (2002) defines qualitative research as taking place in a “natural setting,” involving interactive methods, being adaptable, and relying on personal interpretation (pp. 181-182). He argues that qualitative researchers cannot separate themselves from their work and must acknowledge their positioning and biases. Creswell (2002) urges novice researchers to pinpoint just one strategy. My strategy was ethnographic: a study of the behaviors shared by “an intact cultural group” through observations or personal interviews (p. 14). In this case, the behaviors were the practices around affirming queer identities and the cultural group was queer-allied educators. This strategy enabled me to gather information from my participants about how to create a curriculum that highlighted and empowered queerness. I drew upon the expertise of these educators to write engaging and informative lessons as well as to learn what barriers, from personal to institutional, might restrict teachers from implementing a queer curriculum. Considering that this study was about praxis, it was most constructive for me to use ethnography.

Positionality

Due to my identities, as listed in the Introduction, I recognize that my analysis is limited by my own ontological positioning. Furthermore, I have previous connections with the schools included in my study; two I attended for school and for camp, and the other was an organization for which I worked. Due to this history, I came into my interviews holding preconceived notions about the schools and people involved, but I evaluated the data using ethnographic methods such as interviews with teachers and observations in schools.

Procedure

My choice of interviewees purposefully only included those whom I knew supported queerness in education. Furthermore, I purposefully only included educators working with elementary school students since it is more rare, and thus of greater interest to me, to find teachers introducing queer topics to this age group. I also asked my participants to refer me to others in their schools. This is called a snowball sample (Schutt, 1996, p. 164). One limitation of picking my interviewees in such a way is that there are many more educators doing this work but from whom I did not have the opportunity to learn. Additionally, none of my interviewees
taught at a traditional public school; thus, I did not learn directly about the experiences of public school teachers who incorporate queer topics into the Common Core curriculum.

The following information reflects what was true at the time of the interview. All the names are pseudonyms.

Interview 1: Ellena Evans self-identified as a White, cisgender, lesbian woman. She was the Campus Manager for a K-5 after school program at Applewood Charter School, serving predominantly Latinx and Black students in East Harlem, New York City.

Interview 2: Shayna Valentin was the Director of Equity and Community at Peachtree, a private preK-12 school in lower Manhattan. She self-identified as a cisgender, Dominican and Puerto Rican, Afro-Latina, lesbian woman.

Interview 3: Jacob Phillips was in his sixth year as the librarian at Juniper: a private preschool-5th grade school in lower Manhattan. He self-identified as a White, gay, transsexual man.

Interview 4: Lysette Fisher was in her second year as the 10s (5th grade) head teacher at Juniper. She self-identified as a cisgender, Dominican and Turkish, straight female.

Interview 5: Dianne Watkins, Klara Peters, and Rachel Robinson were teachers for the 8s/9s (combined 3rd and 4th grade classes) at Juniper. They all self-identified as cisgender, White women, but Dianne and Klara identified as mostly straight while Rachel identified as straight.

I chose to interview educators in the spaces where they worked in order to get a clearer picture of what their work looked like. I chose a semi-structured format and asked my participants questions about their experiences of queerness in their own education as well as how queer studies were enacted in the schools where they were teaching. I audio-recorded all but one interview.

After collecting my data, I used grounded theory to look for themes across my responses (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Although I remained open to new themes and points of interest that arose from the data, I entered the analysis by allowing the questions below to guide me:

1) What practices do these educators use to support queerness in education and can I adapt any of their practices for my curriculum?

2) What are the challenges associated with implementing a curriculum about queerness?

3) What should our intentions be for the role of queerness in education?

These questions also aided me in answering my research question: What has queer studies for elementary school children looked like so far? By listening to the experiences of teachers, hearing their struggles, journeys, and goals, I gained further knowledge about how queer studies are being practiced in some schools and where teachers hope to take it.

Considering the small sample size of my study, I was not able to generalize any of the information I gathered to a larger population of teachers or queer-allied teachers. Yet, that was not the point. The knowledge and practices of my interviewees...
are grounded in lived experience and have guided me in shaping my curriculum.

I incorporated many suggestions from my interviewees for activities and books to include in my curriculum. For example, I included a trans-centered chapter book called *George* by Alex Gino, which Jacob had recommended. Furthermore, the Human Growth and Development study at Juniper inspired me to include a unit on bodies and puberty at the beginning of my curriculum. One year after completing my project, I asked two of my interviewees, Shayna and Jacob, to review it. This is a form of member checking (Birt et al., 2016), whereby I capitalized upon their expansive knowledge of curriculum development and queer subjects. They read through the 23 lessons I wrote and provided me with feedback about my wording, inclusivity, scope, and sequence. I used their suggestions to increase the clarity and effectiveness of my lessons.

**Analysis and Discussion**

In order to create my queer curriculum, it was vital for me to synthesize the data I collected from my seven interviewees and reflect on its relation to my work. I categorized the information I learned into the following themes: 1) Social Justice Work: exploring the different approaches these educators use in teaching students about pertinent issues in society, 2) Supporting Individual Students: how educators have supported students who don’t conform to gender or sexual norms, 3) Teacher Positionality: how teachers’ identities may impact their work with students, 4) Homonormativity and Normalization: what are our goals for queerness in education?

Juniper and Peachtree have vastly different approaches to teaching social justice. Peachtree has an administrator in charge of developing and executing the social justice curriculum, diversity events, and affinity groups, while Juniper does not. Consequently, Peachtree has a developed social justice curriculum for every grade. The curriculum specifically highlights race, gender, sexuality, and class, and teaches students about the ways in which their identities are privileged or not privileged in different spaces. Juniper, however, takes a more student-led approach. During our interview, Lysette told me that she had asked her 10s what topics they were interested in. Although they had many ideas, the class ended up focusing on the effects of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. In terms of queer topics, the teachers at Juniper mentioned that these came up organically through the social justice curriculum, books they read in class, and students’ questions. More direct approaches occurred during Library class with Jacob and during the Human Growth and Development unit.

After observing and learning about Juniper and Peachtree’s social justice work, I was tempted to position one school’s approach as superior. Yet, Peachtree’s formalized approach worked for Peachtree, and Juniper’s student-driven approach worked for Juniper. It’s important to note that in both schools, students approached faculty with a request to change gender-specific bathroom signs in order to incorporate more inclusive practices. This speaks to the passion for equity both schools have developed in their students.

Every queer educator I interviewed expressed at least one sentiment in common: each wished to have attended K-12 schools that supported their queer identities, where they could have had openly queer teachers and explicit instruction around queer topics. Ellena and Shayna found a few teachers in high school to whom they could disclose their
identities, but for the most part, they felt isolated and confused. Given their personal experiences feeling marginalized at school, these educators took great lengths to ensure that all of their own students were included.

Not all teachers will be able to relate to their queer students in the same way; however, those who do not identify as queer still have a responsibility to include queer students in their classroom. For example, Lysette recalled having a student who was “unsure of her [gender] identity at the time.” When the class went on overnight trips, “she didn’t like being put in the girls’ cabin; she didn’t like when people addressed the group as ‘ladies’ or anything like that.” In response, Lysette and the other faculty were very conscious about how they addressed gender at school; Lysette read queer-themed books to the students and talked about “honoring individuality.”

Although Lysette did not have to hide her sexual or gender identities in high school, she is committed to validating those of her students. “I’m typically pretty comfortable talking with kids about subjects some people might be a little more scared of, and maybe that’s because I’ve always had to talk about race and being different,” Lysette told me. Many educators teaching my curriculum will not embody all or most of the identities in it; yet, Lysette’s willingness to discuss queerness in the classroom is a great example of how teachers can still speak to identities they do not hold in a respectful and understanding manner. It’s important for all teachers, no matter their backgrounds, to be comfortable when talking about queerness and other identities. Otherwise, as Lysette says, students will pick-up on their teacher’s uneasiness surrounding these conversations and will feel uncomfortable asking questions or having discussions. When teachers are not comfortable addressing topics like race, gender, or sexuality in the classroom, they are likely to let harmful comments or perceptions go by unaddressed, thus perpetuating the dominant hierarchies and ideologies we are trying to dismantle.

When teaching about queer topics, it’s not only crucial to consider whether the types of resources being used promote a homonormative framework, but it’s also important to consider one’s goals for introducing these conversations to students. I asked six of my seven interviewees how they would ideally like to see queerness treated in school. Ellena said that in her ideal world, queerness would “be normalized.” Klara said queerness would be treated the “same as straightness,” and Dianne and Rachel agreed. Instead of identifying queer people through their queerness, Rachel said she would want to “integrate” them and would tell students, “Here’s your average person, just like we talk about this other average person in this situation.” Dianne added on that the “ideal treatment would be to have it be as normally thought of as straightness,” but to still have resources for queer students who might have to deal with the stigmatization “outside of the bubble of school.” These four educators, Ellena, Klara, Rachel, and Dianne used words like “normal,” “integrate,” and “the same” when speaking about how queerness should be treated in education.

I was surprised by this high percentage of respondents who wished for queerness to become completely normal, a word with ableist connotations, and in this case, homonormative ones. Although some queer people do have assimilationist goals, there are others for whom this is unwanted or impossible. It is also important to consider who can become normal. White, middle or upper-class, able-bodied gays and lesbians are in a much better position to be seen as normal than queers with
multiple marginalized identities. Furthermore, some queer folks’ existence is predicated on the fact that their sexual and/or gender expressions are not “normal,” and to take that away would be to deny their very beings. Normalization is part of a homonormative tactic to incorporate certain types of queer people into mainstream society without questioning how such a society perpetuates harm. Normalization is erasure.

To be anti-homonormative is to complicate mainstream perceptions of queerness (where they exist) by rejecting the cis, White, monogamous, gay or lesbian parents as the singular portrayal of what it means to be queer. This is difficult to do in schools, which have been White and cis-dominated, family-centered institutions from their inception; furthermore, it is difficult to do the work of complicating an issue when teaching children often involves simplifying. But children can understand more than we give them credit for. They, too, have complex identities, and they can explore the nuances of queerness beyond the fact that Heather has two mommies and Jazz likes dresses.

Not all of my interviewees valued normalization, however. Jacob said he sought queer representation via books, teachers, families, and class discussions; his objective was for queer people to have a more visible presence in schools. Shayna’s ideal treatment of queerness would start even before students entered school. She said she would like to see religious institutions, hospitals, parenting courses, etc., teach parents to raise their children to see difference, not challenge it. She wanted to get at the root of the problems facing queer students by transforming the institutions and people who perpetuate homophobia and heteronormativity. Like Jacob, Shayna sought to include differences in children’s upbringings, not erase them.

Interviewing these seven educators gave me a deeper understanding of how teachers currently address queerness in the classroom. Not only did I collect data on their experiences and personal views, but I also received advice and suggestions from the teachers who have taught about queer topics. Furthermore, it was helpful to see two very different approaches to social justice curricula: one teacher-driven, and one student-driven. For my curriculum, I decided that a fusion of both approaches would be best: highly composed and specific, but with room for teachers to adapt to the specific interests, needs, and identities of their students. In my curriculum, students are guided through a set series of topics to help them think through constructions of gender and sexuality, but teachers are encouraged to take the curriculum in new directions if students find that they have particular interests in certain topics. Further resources are also provided for teachers.

After incorporating my interviewees’ ideas and resources in the initial draft of my curriculum, I reached out to Shayna and Jacob to review it and provide me with feedback. In their responses, Shayna and Jacob supplied me with recommendations for clarifying my writing and making my language more inclusive. Furthermore, Shayna offered an online resource on personal pronouns, and Jacob gave me some practical suggestions about word choice. Jacob also informed me of his personal experience trying to bring a group of children to The LGBT Community Center in NYC, and warned me that it might be difficult to obtain permission for such a field trip as I had planned. I contacted The Center to inquire, and although they do not give tours, they do welcome school groups to visit and look around. However, Jacob’s point reminded me that field trips don’t always go as intended, and not all schools have the resources or
necessary permission to take outings. As a result, I updated my field trip lesson to include alternative suggestions such as attending a different field trip to the New York Historical Society, designing a class mural, or bringing in a guest speaker.

The Curriculum

The curriculum I wrote is broken into four units: 1) bodies, 2) gender, 3) sexual orientation, and 4) identity, privilege, and discrimination. Teachers are encouraged to break up the lessons further, incorporate their own ideas, and respond to the particular needs and interests of their students. Each lesson includes applicable Common Core Standards, most of which fit under the ELA headings of Writing, Reading Literature, Reading Informational Texts, Speaking and Listening, and Language.

The following paragraphs summarize the main learning goals and outcomes of each unit. To access the full curriculum, click here.

Throughout Unit One, students are prompted to think about bodies outside of the rigid, gendered, and ableist ways in which sexual education is usually taught. Students learn about the changes that bodies undergo during puberty in order to provide them with a baseline for understanding how bodies, gender, and sexuality are related later in the curriculum. The first section of this curriculum also helps build a class community where words that may be considered uncomfortable or funny to some are used in respectful manners. To aid their teaching, teachers read aloud Sex is a Funny Word by Cory Silverberg and Fiona Smyth, a queer-inclusive text on sex, bodies, and gender.

During Unit 2, 4th graders begin to make their own personal dictionaries to keep track of the terminology they will be learning such as cisgender, transgender, non-binary, and agender. Key learning goals include understanding the differences between assigned sex and gender identity, identifying various pronouns, and analyzing the gender binary. Students begin independently reading George by Alex Gino, a middle grade novel about a trans girl, and they discuss the text in small groups. Using children’s picture books to aid them, the students brainstorm stereotypes associated with gender, race, and other identity categories and discuss how these can affect individuals.

The students begin Unit 3 by examining different types of families. They split up into groups to prepare read alouds for younger grades using picture books that center queer families. As a class, the 4th graders brainstorm ideas and stereotypes associated with the term “gay” and add new definitions to their dictionaries for sexuality labels such as gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, lesbian, and asexual. A key learning goal is to understand the differences and similarities between gender identity and sexual orientation.

In the final unit, students position their understanding of queerness alongside other forms of identity to investigate how these various identity categories intersect to shape one’s experience of privilege. By the end of Unit 4, students have examined their own identities and begun thinking about which ones afford them privilege. After discussing the relationship between privilege and discrimination, the 4th graders learn about the differences between interpersonal discrimination and legal discrimination. Groups of students perform skits which showcase examples of legal discrimination on the basis of sexuality and gender, next discussing how these scenarios might change depending on the subjects’ other identities like race and class. The main learning outcome for Unit 4
is for students to understand how the concept of intersectionality is related to issues of discrimination and privilege.

As a culminating event, I suggest that families or school personnel are invited into the classroom for presentations, celebrations, and food. The students’ work, including their final projects on *George* by Alex Gino, can be displayed alongside class charts and brainstorms. While it is always important for students’ hard work to be celebrated, it is especially vital for them to share the knowledge they have gained from this study with their community so that families and school staff are aware of the social learning that has taken place.

**Discussion and Implications**

Writing a queer curriculum and implementing it are two different things. It’s easy for me to envision a progressive school with open-minded administrators, teachers, and families who would welcome a new approach to social justice pedagogy; finding such an environment is a different story. And what about the students attending more traditional schools? Don’t they deserve inclusive curricula, too? The unfortunate reality is that public schools in the U.S. are strapped down by Common Core Standards and state-mandated testing, leaving them with little time and resources to implement radical curriculum. It’s also no secret that, especially with the current state of politics, there could be immense pushback to any curriculum that recognizes gender and sexuality outside of a heteronormative and cissexist context.

It’s important that even teachers in less accepting schools or districts push for pedagogy that acknowledges queer and otherwise marginalized identities. Communities of every race, religion, and socioeconomic level have queer members, and they deserve recognition. In every community, children need to learn about society’s vast diversity, and they will be better prepared to go out into the world if they do. While I hope to teach this curriculum in a variety of different settings, until then I will continue incorporating queer-themed literature, diverse images, and critical discussions into my classroom while advocating for curricula that highlights identities usually relegated to the margins.

As I write about the possible challenges with implementing a queer-inclusive curriculum in a more conservative setting, I want to highlight the importance of not referring to such a curriculum as “controversial.” Doing so frames queer people’s literal identities, bodies, and beings as inappropriate and as sites for contention. Allowing this marginalizing and harmful discourse to prevent teachers from implementing queer curricula perpetuates this ideology and teaches students that to be queer is to be problematic.

All educators should be conscious of not just the explicit messages they feed their students about gender, sexuality, race, and other identities, but also the implicit ones. Textbooks, literature, curriculum guides, toys, and posters are filled with words and images that communicate ideas about identities and relationships. Similarly, students learn about queerness through the ways in which it is (not) included in curricula. When non-normative genders and sexualities are only mentioned in passing during the sex education unit, students are taught that queerness exists only under the umbrella of sexual health. When these identities are only mentioned during a mini-lesson on LGBTQ history, students are taught that
queerness only matters when it makes a contribution to society. In both cases, children are taught that queerness exists only as an “other” to dominant genders and sexualities. My curriculum, on the other hand, centers these identities by portraying them as significant in their own right.

One day, I hope to see schools across the country seamlessly incorporating social justice curricula that highlight marginalized bodies. One day, I hope that children have access to a wide range of queer-inclusive, anti-homonormative resources. One day, I hope that queer students, students of color, students with disabilities, undocumented students, students learning English, and all other students who aren’t currently represented and valued in our education system find that they belong. Until then, let’s keep working.

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TEACHING IN THE SERVICE OF FUGITIVE LEARNING

Karen Zaino
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ABSTRACT

In educational scholarship, abolition and fugitivity have been used to theorize youth literacy practices (The Fugitive Literacies Collective, 2020), teaching in solidarity with Black and brown communities (Love, 2019), and learning as an act of rebellion within the oppressive structures of schooling (Patel, 2016; 2019). Additionally, recent works in sociology (Shedd, 2015) and anthropology (Shange, 2020; Sojoyners, 2016) have thoughtfully and comprehensively documented the ways in which the disciplinary mechanisms of schools serve to contain, surveil, and expunge Black students. This paper draws on these recent scholarly interventions as a lens through which educators might engage with the students who and schools in which they teach. Patel (2016) suggests that authentic learning in schools structured by racial capitalism is a “fugitive act”—elusive, subaltern, and, as a result, under-theorized” (Patel, 2016, p. 397). What “fugitive acts of learning” take place in our schools? What relationship to these practices can teachers adopt so that we might “serve and shield” these spaces of “unruly learning” (Patel, 2016, p. 400)?

Keywords: fugitivity, abolition, literacy, autoethnography, racial capitalism
Introduction

Education scholars such as Leigh Patel (2016, 2019), Bettina Love (2019), and the members of the Fugitive Literacies Collective (2020) have increasingly drawn on the legacy of the Black Radical Tradition (Kelley, 2002; Robinson, 2005) in their work, along with its attendant theories of abolition (Davis, 2005; DuBois, 1935; Gilmore, 2017) and fugitivity (Hartman, 2019; Moten, 2003; Sharpe, 2014). Robinson (2005) coined the term Black Radical Tradition to encompass “the ideological, philosophical, and epistemological natures of the Black movement” that arose in the wake of the global expansion of capitalism, which he argues was racialized from its inception (p. 167). Robinson’s excavation of the twin histories of racial capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition has contributed to contemporary interest in abolition and fugitivity among scholars and activists.

Abolition has come to mean the dismantling of racial capitalism and its byzantine systems of containment, especially the prison-industrial complex (Davis, 2005). Fugitivity, meanwhile, is “a powerful way to imagine black life that persists in and in spite of” white supremacy (Sharpe, 2014).

In educational scholarship, abolition and fugitivity have been used to theorize youth literacy practices (The Fugitive Literacies Collective, 2020), teaching in solidarity with Black and brown communities (Love, 2019), and learning as an act of rebellion within the oppressive structures of schooling (Patel, 2016; 2019). Additionally, recent works in sociology (Shedd, 2015) and anthropology (Shange, 2020; Sojoyners, 2016) have thoughtfully and comprehensively documented the ways in which the disciplinary mechanisms of schools serve to contain, surveil, and expunge Black students.

This paper draws on these recent scholarly interventions as a lens through which educators might engage with the students who and schools in which they teach. Patel (2016) suggests that authentic learning in schools structured by racial capitalism is a “fugitive act”—elusive, subaltern, and, as a result, under-theorized” (Patel, 2016, p. 397). What “fugitive acts of learning” take place in our schools? What relationship to these practices can teachers adopt so that we might “serve and shield” these spaces of “unruly learning” (Patel, 2016, p. 400)?

This paper documents my attempts to “[see] more clearly the fugitive acts of learning as they occur within oppressive structures” in schools (p. 400). After positioning myself as a white former high school teacher who recently transitioned to doctoral study, I explore the Black Radical Tradition, abolition, and fugitivity—including the oppressive structures in which this tradition foments—in more detail, followed by a review of the educational literature that has taken up these concepts. Then, following Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2017) idea that “abolitionist critique concerns itself with the greatest and least detail of the arrangements of people and land and resources over time” (p. 227, emphasis in original), I explore the very small world that I inhabited for seven years, an urban high school in the Midwest. I use an autoethnographic case study (Ellis et. al., 2010; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) to name the concrete ways in which oppressive structures shape this school and identify the fugitive learning that occurs within, around, and in spite of these structures. By proposing these initial sites of fugitive learning in one school, I hope to inspire further conversation and questions about the ways in which educational practitioners might more consistently engage in
abolitionist practices.

**Background**

For the last 12 years, I have worked as an English teacher in public high schools. I generally relied on sociocultural theories to frame my thinking about learning (Nasir et. al., 2006; Vossoughi & Gutierrez, 2016) and tried to make space in my classroom for students’ diverse literacy practices (Morrell, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017). But my efforts were sporadic rather than sustained, especially once I moved from a predominantly white community outside Philadelphia to a racially diverse working-class school in a small Northern Kentucky city. In this second context, my classroom practice was shaped by the school-wide contours of rigid curricular mandates, frequent high-stakes testing, and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. These constraining factors are not unusual in urban schools, especially those that serve working-class, racially minoritized students, and I appreciated research that clearly documented these problems (Au, 2016; Christle et. al., 2005; Kavanaugh & Fisher-Ari, 2018; Meiners, 2007). At the same time, I was frustrated by scholarly literature that either delineated the perils of restrictive contexts or explored the meaningful learning happening in less restrictive contexts. It was difficult to find research that attempted to theorize meaningful learning that might happen even within the constraints of under-resourced, over-regulated schools.

My introduction into the Black Radical Tradition, fugitivity, and abolition was a short article by Leigh Patel (2016). By characterizing learning “as dialectic to the stratifying cultures of formal education” (p. 397), Patel evokes both the oppressive conditions of schools and the meaningful learning that might take place within them. This article spoke to a desire I didn’t know I had until I read about it: I wanted to better understand what happened in my school in a way that neither romanticized my students’ learning possibilities nor diminished the subversive acts of learning in which they participated.

As I transitioned from teaching to doctoral education, I wanted to take advantage of the possibilities of this liminal position (Turner, 1967; Cook-Sather, 2011) to consider my observations from my years in school in light of my deeper immersion in theoretical literature. Over the course of this project, I have become increasingly identified with the academy in which I now situate myself, losing some of the intimacy of immediate experience in my school but also gaining important insights into what it means to research and theorize about schools. For instance, as a white researcher, I experience increasing ambivalence about taking up the idea of abolition and fugitivity, practices inseparable from the Black Radical Tradition (Kelley, 2002; Robinson, 2005). What are the limits to my capacity to understand fugitivity and limits to the general applicability of a theory that arose in the very specific context of chattel slavery? What are the dangers of the white appropriation of such theorizing?

However, rather than evade the messiness of exploring these limits, I want to grapple with them directly. I want to acknowledge this tension and consider the extent to which this theory of fugitive learning speaks to something important that is happening in urban schools. In particular, I think it is essential for educational researchers and practitioners to consider the roles we can play in serving and shielding spaces of unruly learning (Patel, 2016, p. 400). Before we can adequately serve and shield such learning, however, we must
understand what fugitive learning in schools might look like. In the next section, I explore the Black Radical Tradition, fugitivity, and abolition in some detail, first as they have been theorized across a range of scholarship and then how these concepts have recently been applied to educational research.

**Conceptual Framework**

**The Black Radical Tradition**

In his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric Robinson (2005) begins his theory of the Black Radical Tradition with a critique of Karl Marx’s theory of capital development. Marx failed to recognize “one of [Europe’s] most profound terms of order”: racialization (p. 66). Robinson suggests that “racialism and its permutations” have existed in European culture throughout history (p. 27-28). Therefore, as capitalism arose in Europe, it did so in the context of a social order that was always already racialized. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2017) succinctly argues, capitalism requires inequality, and racism—which she defines as “the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (2007, p. 247)—enshrines it. Racism provides the organizing logic for capitalist “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2004), the system through which disinvestment of some becomes a site of wealth accumulation for others.

The Black Radical Tradition arose as racial capitalism became global and gave birth to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Kidnapped from their homes by Europeans, enslaved Africans retained their “ontological and cosmological systems” (Robinson, 2005, p. 122). These cultural legacies contributed to the development of a unique resistance movement among members of the Black diaspora. The “collective resistance by Blacks to slavery and colonial imperialism” (p. 169) was undergirded by a “shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being” (p. 171). These “freedom dreams” (Kelley, 2002) have persisted alongside and serve as a constant foil to racial capitalism, and have manifested in two particular forms of resistance: fugitivity and abolition.

Robinson points out the earliest forms of rebellion against enslavement “took the form of flight” (p. 130). African fugitives were less interested in dismantling plantations than they were in recreating their own communities outside the boundaries of European domination (Robinson, 2005). While escape attempts may have appeared individualistic and spontaneous, Robinson argues that they were part of a collective consciousness that resulted, at times, in maroon societies and, in the case of Haiti, a nation. Fugitivity is an essential unruliness (Hartman, 2019; Moten, 2003; Sharpe, 2014;), the act of “seeing around corners, stockpiling in crevices, knowing the un-rules, being unruly, because the rules are never enough, and not even close” (Macharia, 2013). Fugitive planning has a long history in Black critical thought (Moten and Harney, 2013; Sharpe, 2014; Kelley, 2016). Kelley (2016) suggests that fugitive planning invokes “a memory of freedom, dreams of seizing it, and conspiracies to enact it.” In the 21st century, fugitivity “takes myriad forms, including school truancy, gender nonconformity, border crossing, bench-warrant avoidance, and prison abolition” (Quan, 2017, p. 185). These fugitive activities can be individual or collective, spontaneous or calculated, but they are united by a commitment to dreaming and enacting freedom.

Abolition, though traditionally associated with the successful movement to abolish slavery
in the United States, has gained renewed attention following the longtime work of prison abolitionists such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, and Mariame Kaba. Davis (2005) has elaborated W.E.B. DuBois’s (1938) conception of “abolition-democracy”—an imagined social organization, briefly enacted during Reconstruction, in which the principles of freedom were broadly applied to all—and argued that prisons must be abolished. Gilmore (2007, 2017) has likewise theorized abolition extensively, noting in a recent interview with The Funambulist (2019) that:

Contemporary prison abolitionists have made this argument for more than two decades. Abolition is not absence, it is presence. What the world will become already exists in fragments and pieces, experiments and possibilities. So those who feel in their gut deep anxiety that abolition means knock it all down, scorch the earth and start something new, let that go. Abolition is building the future from the present, in all of the ways we can.

Abolition, in Gilmore’s formulation, builds on the fugitive practices that already exist in the world, the “beautiful experiments” (Hartman, 2019) that, sheltered and sustained, flower into a future that is free.

**Fugitivity and Abolition in Educational Scholarship**

Theories of abolition and fugitivity have increasingly been invoked in educational scholarship. In “Pedagogies of Resistance and Survivance: Learning as Marronage,” Leigh Patel (2016) characterizes learning as a “fundamentally fugitive act” (p. 397). She challenges educators and educational researchers to recognize these “fugitive acts of learning” and to “differentiate those moments… from the seductive mollification of school-based achievement” (p. 397). Noting the stubborn conflation of learning with the production of test scores, Patel argues that we need theories of learning that complicate and supplant the emaciated ideal of achievement. Her theory’s namesake, *marronage*, is the term applied to the overt and covert practices used by historically enslaved people to seek liberation. Marronage is “a practice of freedom that must, necessarily, start from the condition and category of enslavement in order to transgress it” (p. 401); Patel suggests that learning, too, can be understood as occurring in spite of, as a consequence of, and in the shadows of traditional schooling.

Along with racial capitalism, Patel identifies settler colonialism, a type of colonialism in which the settler as the organizing logic of traditional schooling. Indeed, in the United States, racial capitalism has always worked in tandem with settler colonialism, defined by Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) as “the specific formation of colonialism in which the colonizer comes to stay, making himself the sovereign, and the arbiter of citizenship, civility, and knowing” (p. 73). This “logic of elimination” creates territorial claims and concomitant wealth generation through the ongoing erasure of indigenous peoples (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013, p. 73). Settler colonialism and racial capitalism, manifesting as indigenous erasure and pervasive antiblackness, are thus inextricably linked in the production of capital in American society, and in this paper, I use the term racial capitalism with an understanding of its original relationship to colonialism and extraction (Robinson, 2005) and its contemporary
relationship to settler colonialism in the United States. In Patel’s formulation, learning exists in dialectical relationship to racial capitalism, a series of risky practices whose transformative potential is inherently unpredictable and liberatory.

A group of literacy scholars, the Fugitive Literacies Collective, has also taken up theories of fugitivity in their work on teaching and learning. In a recent special issue of *English Education*, guest editors Esther O. Ohito, Jamila Lyiscott, Laura Gonzales, and Mónica González Ybarra (2020) describe the Collective as “a constellation of critical scholar-friends of color… [who] think, study, write, and publish together in an intentional effort to irradiate the knowledges, complexities, and tensions that percolate when possibilities for the real or fictive liberation of historically marginalized and dehumanized persons and communities…” are taken seriously (p. 180).

In this issue, Ohito (2020) argues that attention to Black fugitivity in the literacy classroom confronts an ongoing problem in anti-racist literacy scholarship that frames white teachers and students as the protagonists and “Black people… as embodied reminders to white people that they, too, are raced” (p. 195). Fugitive literacy practices provide an opening for Black scholars to theorize the experience of Blackness “as something more than an abiding source of suffering and abjection” (p. 197, emphasis in original). Similarly, in the same issue, Lyiscott (2020) suggests that in a world that devours the public spectacle of Black pain, the private shared intimacies, cultural practices, and experiential wisdom of Black people are fugitive acts. Authors in this special issue ultimately coalesce around Ohito’s definition of fugitive literacy practices as those that “involve creative uses of reading, writing, and oral language [along with a range of related cultural practices] as strategic tools for the curricular and pedagogic refusal of the hegemony of whiteness and anti-Blackness” (p. 189).

Along with fugitivity, theories of abolition in educational practice have proliferated in the last few years. Abolitionist thinking in education grows out of attention to how education funnels racialized students into the carceral system through the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Christle et. al., 2005; Wald & Losen, 2003), a metaphor that has since been troubled by scholars wishing to complicate our understandings of the relationship between prisons and schools. More recently, the terms school-to-prison nexus (Meiners, 2007), school-prison nexus (Annamma, 2017; Krueger, 2010; Krueger-Henney, 2019), the prison-industrial complex (Meiners & Winn, 2010), and the universal carceral apparatus (Shedd, 2015) have been taken up to suggest the complicated material and ideological manifestations of carceral logics in schools. Carceral logics deny Black and brown children access to the supposed innocence of childhood (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Meiners, 2016; Morris, 2015) and infuse schools with disciplinary policies, practices, and police, all of which disproportionately punish and exclude racialized children (Annamma, 2016; Crenshaw, 2012; Schynder, 2010; Shedd, 2015; Turner & Benneke, 2020; Wun, 2015). As Rodriguez (2010) points out, “the carceral-cultural form of the prison has naturalized a systemic disorientation of the teaching act, so that teaching is no longer separable from the work of policing, juridical discipline, and state-crafted punishment” (p. 8).

Abolitionist approaches to educational research and practice are predicated on this understanding of schools as an extension of the carceral state. Abolition is “a messy breakup with the state” in
contrast to liberal reforms, or even revolutionary ideologies, that seek to revise or “win control” over the state apparatus (Shange, 2020 p. 5). To imagine “abolitionist futures” in education “requires reconstructing the structures and traditions that safeguard power and privilege, just as much as taking down those that visibly punish and oppress” (Meiners & Winn, 2010, p. 273), as well as shielding the “Black autonomous spaces”—the spaces that have allowed for the flourishing of Black creative life and freedom struggles that are often the explicit and implicit target of policing within and beyond schools (Sojoyner, 2016). Abolition “anticipates the task of remaking the world under transformed material circumstances” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 15), asking us to work alongside young people, especially Black and brown students “whose imagination often [outpace] the mundane rituals of a standards-driven curriculum” (Schynder, 2010, p. 349).

Bettina Love’s (2019) recent book We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom has propelled the term abolition into mainstream teacher education. Love draws on thinkers such as W.E.B. DuBois and Angela Davis, as well as the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement, to distinguish her abolitionist approach from traditional reformist models of school improvement. Whereas reform models encourage Black and brown students and families to survive in schools, to adapt to unjust conditions, abolitionist teaching calls on educators to dismantle the policies and practices that diminish and dehumanize students and families. Abolitionist teaching is thus both a theoretical stance—a vision for education that imagines its possibilities beyond its racist instantiations—and a daily practice of working in solidarity with communities of color.

Love’s recommendations range from those that can be enacted in the classroom (curriculum development and pedagogical practice) to those that are school- and system-wide (equitable funding; ending exclusionary disciplinary practices and discriminatory standards for behavior and dress; abolish high-stakes testing; etc.)

Meanwhile, David Stovall’s (2018) provocative call for “school abolition” uses the framework for the abolition of the prison industrial complex to reimagine education beyond the material and ideological structures of traditional schooling. “Schooling” in its traditional sense—both as a literal place and as a set of ideologies about learning and behavior—is distinct from, if not explicitly antithetical to, education for liberation, instead relying on surveillance and containment to enforce narrow, Eurocentric ways of being and knowing. Stovall contrasts “school” with the liberatory educative agendas of historical slave rebellions, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Quilombo movement in Brazil, and the Black Lives Matter uprisings in the United States and encourages us to consider how we might enact such educational possibilities in our own contexts. Thus, although broad in its vision, abolitionist teaching and learning requires sustained attention to the minute ways in which carceral logics permeate schools and the ways in which young people resist these mechanisms.

**Methods**

In this project, I employ an autoethnographic case study approach (Ellis et. al., 2010; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) to provide concrete examples of the oppressive structures and fugitive acts of learning that occur within Midwest High School, the urban high school where I taught for seven years. While not generalizable in the traditional sense, a case
study is well-suited for theory building and allows us to understand more concretely what fugitive acts of learning might look like in one specific context (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). I explicitly engage in an autoethnographic case study to draw on the experiential insight I have gained as a teacher in this school (Ellis et. al., 2010). This specificity is important when considering colonial logics of erasure: claims of objectivity or universality actually center specific White, patriarchal, middle-class norms (Wynter, 2003). By looking closely at one school and centering my personal knowledge of this school, I try to honor the specificity of place and disturb universalizing Eurocentric epistemologies. I am also inspired by Davis et. al.’s (2020) recent provocation to look “closely at children’s acts of contestations and moves to elsewhere,” to highlight individual practices as they “emerge from social histories and carry future potentialities that shape learning and intellectual life within, and sometimes beyond, the setting” (p. 2). Indeed, Shange (2020) points out that “[a]s an analytic, abolition demands specificity – the very kinds of granularity that ethnography offers as an accounting of the daily practices that facilitate Black material and symbolic death” (p. 10).

I attempt to balance this close attention to detail with my desire to protect young people and their practices. Patel (2016) points out that slave narratives, for instance, “keep lots of details loose in order to protect the fugitive spirit of the ideas” (p. 400). Recognizing that undue attention to fugitive practices can lead to further restrictions and punishments, I maintain the anonymity of my students and their school and discuss their practices generally, rather than specifically.

Midwest High School is the only public high school in a small Northern Kentucky city just south of Cincinnati. The school is located in a working-class community, and the student body is racially diverse: 46 percent self-identify as white, 33 percent self-identify as Black, 11 percent self-identify as Latinx, and 10 percent self-identify as multiracial. In my case study, I am draw from examples and practices that span racial categories. At the same time, I do not want to suggest that white students are surveilled to the same extent as Black students, or that the experience of a bilingual Latinx immigrant at Midwest High is the same as the experience of a Black student. It is necessary to explore the differential impacts of racial capitalism, but that project is beyond the scope of my autoethnographic case study. With Gonzalez et. al. (2020), who employ fugitive literacies to theorize the resistance practices of transfronterizx youth, I aim not to equate incommensurate student experiences but to contribute to the ongoing necessity of re-thinking our often carceral approaches to young people in schools.

An Autoethnographic Case Study of Fugitive Learning at Midwest High School

In this section, I explore three iterations of fugitive learning that I witnessed during my time as a teacher at Midwest High School. Following Patel’s suggestion that learning must be understood in dialectic relation to oppressive structures, I organize each example of fugitive learning by first identifying a particular policy that serves to constrain students; I then explore the ways in which students subvert or creatively re-appropriate these mechanisms.

Repurposing Technologies that Control & Surveilence

In 2016, Midwest High School implemented a
1:1 initiative in which every student was assigned a laptop. Administrators and teachers attempted to control how laptops were used through a variety of techniques. The laptops were front-loaded with expensive scripted curricula that strictly dictated what students would be taught. The school also purchased surveillance technology that allowed teachers and administrators to remotely view and hijack student screens, to shut down computers, to send messages to students, and to lock them out of applications at any time. Popular websites like youtube, Facebook, and political news sites were blocked by the district and/or the state. These “unseemly realities of containment and profit” were “accepted obliquely under the umbrella of schooling and… wrongly associated with learning” (Patel, 2016, p. 397). Of course, surveillance isn’t always high tech, and it isn’t always expensive. At one staff meeting, our principal suggested that teachers organize our classrooms by lining the desks against walls, making the students face the wall so that we could surveil all of their computer screens simply by standing in the middle of the room. In other words, he unironically asked us to turn our classrooms into versions of the panopticon (Foucault, 1975).

But students found ways to evade censorship and to repurpose these technologies. They downloaded apps that provided answers to popular corporate curricula; they found proxies that gave them access to blocked websites; they used the messaging tool on the surveillance program to send messages back to teachers, saying “leave me alone” and “I’m not doing anything wrong.” As a result of these workarounds, students were able to use their laptops as powerful tools for research and communication: they applied for jobs, chatted with friends, researched colleges, watched movies, made music, and read the news. Ironically, the laptops allow students to locate—either serendipitously or through targeted research—videos, articles, and social media posts that provide context for local injustices (e.g., sexist dress code) that they otherwise assume are individual or inevitable. In fact, it was through reading news online and through social media sites like Facebook that students learned about the nationwide March for Our Lives student protest in 2018 and were inspired to join. The laptops, meant to narrow opportunities for learning and control the content students encounter, became empowering tools that opened up “fundamentally unpredictable” possibilities for critical thinking, literacy, and solidarity (Patel, 2016, p. 399).

**Sharing Subversive Texts in a Standardized Curriculum**

One of the primary reasons Midwest High School purchased laptops was to prepare students more efficiently for high-stakes tests. In Kentucky, many high school classes culminate in corporate end-of-course assessments, and the content of these tests dictates the contours of the classroom curriculum. English teachers, for example, are required to structure their curriculum around decontextualized, culturally hegemonic nonfiction passages; multiple-choice questions; and brief on-demand writing exercises. These are the kinds of narrow literacies that students will encounter on standardized tests. Students at Midwest High were thus denied access to diverse literacies and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Morrell, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017; Skerret, 2010).

But within this prescribed curriculum, students found a “side street from the test score mill of schooling” (Patel, 2016, p. 400). Students pursued their own diverse
literacy practices, sharing subversive texts of all kinds: Snapchats, text messages, music, art, poetry, memes, gifs, and novels. None of these practices were school-sanctioned, especially those that involved communicating using cell phones. Indeed, even the once staid English class tradition of reading novels became fugitive in this context. There has been a huge influx of popular young adult novels in the last few years, of which *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017) may be the most emblematic. Featuring a young Black girl whose unarmed friend is killed by a police officer in an all-too-familiar context, this book quickly became a best-seller for young people nationwide.

Students at Midwest High School found *The Hate U Give* and similar books in the library and began reading them during their classes under their desks. Friends would badger one other: “When are you gonna be done? I want to read that.” Yet these literacy practices rarely occurred as part of the official curriculum. When I tried to incorporate some of these texts as a simultaneous undercurrent to my official curriculum, my students began reading these novels in other classes, and some teachers called me to complain. They asked me if I could tell my students to stop reading in their class. Authentic literacy practices—reading, sharing, and discussing texts that have been deemed illicit—are fugitive acts in this school.

*Claiming The “Weak Spots” In A Restrictive Schedule*

Because so many courses culminate in high-stakes tests, the results of which are used to determine school performance ratings (and subsequent sanctions) in Kentucky, many classes are closely surveilled by the administration. This surveillance takes many forms: administrators conduct constant announced and unannounced walk-throughs, during which they check for daily learning objectives, standardized test practice, and student compliance. Administrators also ask teachers in these classes to submit raw data in the form of practice test results, and the analysis of these results, every six weeks. Teachers must submit unit plans, lesson plans, and yearlong curriculum maps. As a result, even teachers who may wish to supplement or eschew required curricular mandates are given few opportunities to do so.

As certain classes receive intense scrutiny, though, students can find untested, under-surveilled spaces and times, where there is more room for genuine conversation, exploration, and creation. Certain spaces are less subject to administrative or teacher control: the library, the cafeteria, counselor offices, and other non-instructional spaces can provide momentary refuge from a highly regimented schedule. At Midwest High School, students often gather in the library during lunch, before school, or during class time when they have finished assignments; the librarian teaches them to knit and recommends books. Each year, she hosts a chess tournament, and for weeks beforehand, dozens of students gather in the library to learn to play. The relaxed, collegial atmosphere of this space is a marked contrast to many classrooms. This supports the range of scholarly literature that confirms the importance of after-school activities for student learning (Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Darling, 2005).

But even within the school day, certain times are less scrutinized than others. Lunch, elective classes, and the brief times between classes become momentary refuges from the otherwise carefully
scheduled day. Even in closely monitored courses, however, certain times are more amenable to risky and transformative acts of learning. In the weeks following the administration of high stakes tests, for instance, most classes are under-surveilled, because the purpose of formal schooling —demonstrating mastery on an exam—has been accomplished. The days before and after extended breaks from school are also less likely to be carefully monitored. Teachers and students use these more relaxed times in a variety of ways: they watch movies, plan out-of-school events, read, debate and discuss, research topics of interest, play games, and write poems and stories. Though Midwest High School may not be a “place for transformation” (Patel, 2016, p. 397), within its walls, students, and sometimes teachers, carve out spaces for fugitive learning.

**Discussion**

In her recent book *We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and Educational Freedom*, Bettina Love (2018) argues that abolition is both a theoretical stance—a vision for education that imagines its possibilities beyond current racist school policies—and a daily practice of working in solidarity with communities of color. Abolition is essential in conceptions of learning as a fugitive act; when learning is fugitive, abolition is the process of dismantling the structures that force learning into secret “side streets” (Patel, 2016, p. 400). This dismantling can take many forms and addresses both the practical manifestations and ideological underpinnings of racial capitalism in schools.

Case studies in fugitive learning, drawing on the legacy of “radical scholarship [that] continues to make visible histories and pathways of resistance” (Meiners & Winn, 2010, p. 273) can provide insight into the policies and ideologies that abolitionist teachers and researchers must target in their interventions. In locating sites of student resistance, repurposing, and evasion, we can untangle the specific policies and ideologies that create the conditions students subvert. In this section, I examine these conditions at Midwest High School and draw conclusions about which policies and ideologies require dismantling, along with which practices can be served and developed.

**Surveillance Technologies**

Surveillance technologies in schools reinvigorate racist legacies of hyper-surveillance of communities of color (Sewell et. al., 2016; Glover, 2008; Lewis, 2006; Raible & Irrizarry, 2010). These technologies are part of the larger “carceral-cultural form of the prison [that] has naturalized a systemic disorientation of the teaching act, so that teaching is no longer separable from the work of policing, juridical discipline, and state-crafted punishment” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 8). When schools assume that student access to content must be controlled, they reveal the lack of trust at the heart of their school culture and the assumptions that students will misuse and abuse freedom. Educational practitioners can combat these policies on a local level—turning off these technologies in their own classrooms, advocating for its abolition at the school and district level—and researchers can investigate the impacts these technologies have on student learning and school culture. As Love (2018) argues, though, abolition is not merely dismantling—it is also imagining and building a different reality. Abolitionist teachers and researchers must ask: What does a school look like when it trusts its students? What happens when students are given
the freedom to use tools and technologies to their full creative potential?

**High-Stakes Tests And Narrow Curricula**

High-stakes tests have been consistently delegitimized as adequate measures of learning (Berliner, 2011; Fisher-Ari et al., 2017; Knoester & Au, 2017), and some communities have fought to reduce reliance on testing in schools (Mitra et al., 2018; Crowder & Konle, 2015). However, standardized testing persists in many schools (Au, 2016). Abolitionist researchers and practitioners must continue to advocate for the diminished reliance on testing in schools and to imagine alternative curricula and assessments that are inspired by actual student literacy practices. At Midwest High School, students read young adult literature and constantly communicate and share resources using computers and cell phones. Practitioners can develop their own curricula that center these resources, and they can advocate for students who engage in these literacy practices, shielding them from administrative control, teacher criticism, and punitive disciplinary measures. Researchers, meanwhile, some of whom already consider the everyday literacy practices of students outside of school (Gutierrez et al., 2017) can consider what everyday literacy practices in schools look like and how these practices can be incorporated more systemically into schools.

**Non-Academic Spaces**

While surveillance technologies, high stakes tests, and narrow curricula necessitate dismantling, non-academic spaces in school require support. Schools are structured by racial capitalism, but within them, students find spaces of refuge that can be collaborative, generative, and enjoyable. Abolitionist researchers and practitioners must recognize the value of these offices, libraries, and elective courses (Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Darling, 2005; Goodin, 2010; Kachel, 2011), both documenting their value and actively protecting their existence in schools that are constantly seeking to cut funding to “non-essential” elements (Ravitch, 2016). Although certain spaces, like libraries, are almost universally important in schools, the meanings of many non-academic spaces are contextually contingent. In one school, the college counselor office might be the place of refuge; in another, the gym might serve this function; and in most schools, multiple spaces will serve different students. Abolitionist researchers and practitioners can also investigate more seriously specific times in the year, looking for and building on important learning that might happen after testing or around long breaks. This research requires sustained engagement with schools and students to learn to the specific places and times that yield transformative learning.

Ultimately, as abolitionist researchers and practitioners “learn to see” (Gutierrez et al., 2017) fugitive learning in schools, we simultaneously set ourselves up to gather information about the racial capitalist policies we want to dismantle—and the practices we want to serve, shield, and build on in educational spaces.

**Conclusion**

This case study suggests that fugitive learning in schools exists in dialectic relationship to particular manifestations of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. At Midwest High School, these structures manifest in an over-reliance on restrictive technology, a narrow emphasis on tests, and the hyper-surveillance of certain spaces and the devaluing of others. Student resistance occurs in
response to these particularities: students creatively appropriate technologies that are meant to control and constrict their learning opportunities; they share subversive texts within curricula that rely on narrow definitions of literacy; and they take advantage of under-surveilled spaces and times in a generally rigid school schedule. While the case study in this article examines a limited set of practices at a single school, it provides a valuable starting point for research into the nature of racial capitalism and settler colonialism manifest in schools, and how and when “intermittent departures” from these oppressive structures occur (Patel, 2016, p. 401). Further research is needed to investigate how these piecemeal practices have been or could be developed into larger projects of transformative learning in the service of abolition. However, we must also acknowledge the fugitive learning that we do not see, as adults; as well, those of us who are white must acknowledge that fugitive learning that may be illegible to us. As Shange (2020) reminds us, sometimes we must commit to “care more than we can know”—to support our students, and to assume they are always learning and creating, regardless of whether their learning and creation is immediately available to us (p. 10). Fugitive learning and abolitionist practice require imagination, a vision that draws on the “beautiful experiments” of the present to envision a future in which we are all free (Hartman, 2019).

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The Fugitive Literacies Collective, 2020 - editors

Esther O. Ohito, Jamila Lyiscott, Laura Gonzales, and Mónica González Ybarra (2020)


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Down the Rabbit Hole

Tabitha Dell’Angelo
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ABSTRACT

Interviews and observations of first year teachers in the northeastern United States were used to construct a comic. The comic communicates the excitement, fears, and competing demands of a beginning teacher. The dialogue and setting are presented as surrealist to help the reader gain an understanding of the affective realities that the teachers expressed when describing their early teaching experiences. This approach allows for the multiple dimensions of the teachers’ lived experiences to be experienced in ways that a traditional text does not allow. The work takes a critical look at the transition of beginning teachers into their careers and is meant to trouble notions of standardization in both teacher preparation and curriculum design. This arts-based approach recognizes performance as both a method of investigation and representation (Worthen, 1998). Given that public education is often a prominent part of societal discourse, this modality allows the reader the opportunity to make meaning of the data by experiencing the words on the page (Leavy, 2009). The illustrations allow the reader to experience the words differently than traditional text. In this way, dramatizing the data is a form of critical pedagogy (Denzin, 2006).

Keywords: arts based research, practice based research, a/r/tography, urban education, teacher preparation
50% of teachers leave the profession within 5 years.

16% change schools.

17% never return to teaching.

Many cry in their car on their way home from work...
I AM A TEACHER!

I DID IT.
HUH?

WH-WHA-

TRIP

DANGER: HOLE

AAAAAAAAHHH
Ms. Lambert, first grade. 
Latitude 40.268336. 
Longitude -74.777965. 
Curious.

Rub, rub, rub.

MMPH...

I'm a teacher, I'm a teacher, so so fun, so so fun, brush brush.

My students will adore me, I will make a difference, watch me teach, watch them learn!
Hey kid.

You're gonna need this too.

Good luck.

What to Expect
When you're expecting 25 to 30 students who may or may not be prepared & may or may not be experiencing trauma.

Hey.

C'mere.

Who is there?
OH, HELLO?

Hmmm..." 

HEY... Wanna buy a letter "E"?

WHAT? No, you should go?

Nah, I'm just kiddin' so, you a good guy, or a bad guy?

Click.

I'm on the lookout for enemies.... I haven't slept in weeks?

WELL, A GOOD GUY.... GIRL--PERSON, OF COURSE?

I am sorry for that. But, I am certainly not an enemy.
Well, what are you?
I—I’m a teacher!

A likely story. No, you’re no good. Just like the rest of them. Next you’ll be telling me you like the kids.

Of course I do. I love children.

You don’t even know these kids. They don’t matter to you.

They matter quite a lot to me.

Hm.

We’ll see. A-ight, I got something for you.

Fwoosh
OH MY! OH MY!

WHAT IS THIS?

YA NEED TO HANG THAT CLOTH UP! IF YOU HEAR 'DAT POP POP POP, GET DOWN FAST. KEEP THE WINDOWS COVERED.

POP POP POP?

YEAH, YEAH. KEEP THE CHILDREN SAFE. AWAY FROM WINDOWS. HIDE IF YOU HAVE TO GET...

GET DOWN, GET DOWN.

GET DOWN, GET DOWN, JUNGLE BOOGIE!

SAFE FROM WHAT?

OH MY, THIS IS SO DRAB. CAN I GET A MORE COLORFUL CLOTH?
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA
HA

ANOTHER ONE.
Y’ALL AIN’T FROM AROUND HERE?

LOOK.
JUST TAKE CARE OF THEM.

Flap

Flap

THIS JUST WON’T DO.
BUT ... I KNOW!
I WILL DECORATE IT!
MAKE IT PRETTY, MAKE IT PRETTY, YES I WILL, YES I WILL.

WATCH ME MAKE IT HAPPY, WATCH THE STUDENTS SMILES, I CAN'T WAIT, I CAN'T WAIT?

HELLO MS. LAMBERT. WELCOME TO OUR SCHOOL.

Click

Hm?
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
THIS WON'T DO.
I AM HANGING UP THE ALPHABET!
SLAP!
THERE WAS A KID, AND HE SAID I HAD TO HANG THIS GREY CLOTH TO KEEP THE CHILDREN SAFE. I JUST WANTED TO MAKE IT COLORFUL!
THE ALPHABET?
THE ALPHABET.
This is the first grade. Young lady. First grade?

We have higher expectations here.

This is what you will be using.

Next gen science standards: HS DASH PS1 DASH 1, 3, 8.

This is the periodic table.

I am glad you know what it is... since you will be teaching it in about an hour.

And PS2 DASH 6.

To first graders?
IF YOU DON'T HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR STUDENTS THEN MAYBE THIS IS NOT THE PLACE FOR YOU.

NOT HERE, NOT THE PLACE, MAYBE, OR NOT.

NO. OF COURSE, OF COURSE I DO. I JUST DIDN'T REALIZE.

YES YES, I KNOW. WE ARE PUSHING THEM TOO FAST.

SOME MAY SAY. BUT THIS IS WHAT'S NECESSARY.

AND HERE IS THE BOOK YOU WILL DO TODAY.

OH THIS LOOKS LOVELY? THANK YOU. CHILDREN DO SO LOVE ANIMALS. THIS WILL DO JUST FINE!

By Carrol L.
YES, WELL ANIMALS. MS DASH LS2 DASH 1.

JUST BE SURE THEY CAN ANALYZE THE MEANING OF THE ADAGE, "DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY HATCH."

COMMON CORE STANDARD ELA DASH LITERACY, R1 POINT 1 POINT 4.


WHAT WAS THAT?

THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT OF THAT STATEMENT.

AND APPLY IT AS A METAPHOR FOR THEIR OWN LIVES.

ELA 4 POINT 5A.
That may be difficult for them. After all, science and technical literacy standards begin in grade 6, not age 6.

They should. In kindergarten they completed a unit on agriculture and farming. They studied the life cycle. Next gen science standard 6.4.

Raised chicks, built coops, and conducted a study that demonstrated that...

In fact, two thirds of all eggs that are laid do not actually hatch.

It was published in the Journal of Early Years Scholarship.

You should review it before class.
“STUART LITTLE,” OH...

AND “PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH”

“FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON,” BUT THIS IS--

WAIT, “THE HANDMAID’S TALE,” REALLY?

OH, SHAKESPEARE--

ARE YOU SURE?”

THESE ARE THE BOOKS YOU WILL NEED THIS YEAR.
Let’s talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs; Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes—

WAIT! DO YOU HEAR THAT?

DID YOU HEAR THAT?

ARE YOU OK?

DON’T LET THAT NUT JOB SCARE YOU.

TOO LATE.
OH GEEZ, "RICHARD THE SECOND."
WHAT A JOKE, RIGHT?

THANK GOODNESS YOU AGREE

YEAH, DON'T LISTEN TO THEM. WE DO WHAT IS RIGHT FOR THE KIDS. WE DON'T DO ALL THAT B.S.

BUT THE CHICKEN STUDY

YEAH, WE HAD CHICKS. THE REST, WELL ANOTHER TIME.

PHEW

WHAT A RELIEF.

BUT...
You have to put on a little bit of a show when the admins come in to see you. And you get scored on a set of rubrics. That is how you keep your job. So, if they are looking, you are well you know, that might be the day you cover microeconomics.

Rubrics?

Wait, I will show you my portfolio.

Each of these binders contains the lessons, evidence, rubrics, and artifacts that I compiled for each of the three tasks, 39 indicators and 324 data sources needed to prove you are a highly effective teacher.

"Prove"?

DID YOU HEAR THAT? I gotta go!

Good luck?
FWOOO SHH

WH-WHOA.

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you! I've been stuck in there forever!

YOU TALK.
For as long as you let me.

??????

NO WIRES...

NO SPEAKERS...

BUT HOW?
I love stories and playing and talking. I listen to everything that happens here. I have ideas and passions. Let's talk, let's chat?

I heard you singing, I like singing!

How wonderful?

What is the meaning of this?

It's the most wonderful thing, this kite loves stories and learning.

Get rid of that kite?

Rid of it, no. Why?

We have rules, do you want this position or not?
I DO, OF COURSE.

BUT WHY NOT LET THE KITE STAY?

IT IS EXCITED TO BE HERE, TO LEARN.

AND THE NEXT THING YOU KNOW IT WILL WANT TO FLY.

YES! I WANT IT TO FLY.

I want to fly!

AND WHAT IF IT WANTS TO BE LET GO TO REALLY FLY?

WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN YOU LOSE CONTROL OF IT?

WHY DO I NEED TO CONTROL IT?
Let’s choose executors and talk of wills!
SLAM

Click

Frere Jacques...
Frere Jacques...

Dormez-vous...
Dormez-vous...

*Giggle*
Giggle!
Hee-Hee
Chatter
Ha-Ha
Chatter

*GASP*

THE
CHILDREN?

Ms. L

Brush

Brush

CHATTER

CHATTER

Flutter

Flutter

Flutter

Flutter

Flutter
THEY MUST BE IN UNIFORM!
THAT WILL DO. MS. LAMBERT, BESURE THEY DO NOT FLY THEIR COLORS.

CHECK YOUR PAMPHLET. I'M SURE IT'S IN THERE SOMEWHERE.
RUSTLE RUSTLE

LET THEM FLY. HELP THEM FLY.
WATCH THEM FLY.
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