Challenging the production of silent violence in U.S. public schools

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Challenging the Production of Silent Violence in U.S. Public Schools

Submitted in fulfillment of the graduate requirements of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in the International Studies Program

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Abstract

Summarizes the thesis, mentioning aims/purpose, focus of the literature review, methods of research and analysis, the findings, and implications

Meaning is made in schools. What teachers say, the way students sit, the comments shared in class, the hallway interactions—everything creates meaning. Thus schools are microcosms of the larger society that students will be normalized and integrated into. In other words, most U.S. public schools are training grounds that produce individuals who will maintain the rhetoric of U.S. Exceptionalism, capitalism, neo-liberal policies, and cultural imperialism unless such norms are disrupted and challenged.

This thesis asks: Can the U.S. public education system cultivate students that are respectful, compassionate, and open-minded? What are the nuances of U.S. politics that are being recreated in schools? How can administrators, teachers, and students challenge the continuation of violence? By analyzing students’ post-election journal writing and by interviewing individuals during the Trump Presidency, I plan to research the possibility of challenging the production of violence within the U.S. public education system through a case study of a local middle school. The students’ narratives and interview findings provide a perspective that is often overlooked. Themes of student safety, identity politics, and reinforced practices interrogate the silent violence in schools.
“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy”

— bell hooks —

Chapter 1: Introduction

Post-Election Day Letter

Hi everyone,

Today I want to share with you my thoughts as a member of this community. Not as your teacher Ms. Won, but as a fellow individual processing the events of last night.

I was in tears throughout the night, disappointed with the results flashing in front of my eyes with each growing hour. I was sad because our next President is a bully. I ask you all to be active kindness monitors because I believe it’s important and critical to practice kindness and respect in all and every situation. Our next president is not kind. He disrespects women, immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, and threatens the safety of many people—some of whom are our close friends and family.

We deserve a better future then this. We deserve a future where people can come together to celebrate cultures and differences, not build walls between each other. We deserve a future that will encourage us to look after one another, not tear each other down. When we see someone in need, we should offer a helping hand, not push them away. We deserve a leader who we can respect.

Unfortunately, I cannot say that I respect the next president of the United States. He threatens who I am as a person. He disqualifies me based on my gender. He disqualifies me based on my race. He threatens the lives of many other Americans as well as the lives of many people living abroad in war torn countries. Rather than fighting for peace, he fights for war.

Last night, I thought I wouldn’t be at school today because of how overwhelmed I felt. But I read a quote from an author that says, “But we are here. We find ourselves with a job to do, no matter how hard, no matter the pain in our hearts. Do not shrink away.” Though it’s hard for me to do so, I needed to come to school today and share with you how I am feeling. Please understand that there are people hurting across this country today. Please listen to their voices. Please try to understand what is taking place. This is OUR future at stake.
After a sleepless post-election night of unrest, confusion, and anger, I walked into school and asked my cooperating teacher if I could read a letter I wrote to the class. He quickly scanned it over and with a sad smile, shook his head no. As the election affected so many close friends and family, including myself, I initially reacted viscerally. Despite the fact that I identify as an immigrant, person of color, and a woman, all groups of people targeted by Trump’s rhetoric and so said ‘policies,’ I had to smile, keep my head up, and move on with the school day. My letter was deemed too emotional and inappropriate for me to share in the classroom as a student teacher.

What I realized that morning was that schools, especially public schools, are a place where politics has little voice. Yes, schools teach social studies and history, often Eurocentric, and learn about the U.S. government, but there was an un/spoken rule in the building post election day. Both in the faculty lounge and private conversations, I heard several teachers commenting, “I refuse to talk about politics,” and “I teach science, I’m not going to talk about the election.” Moreover, teachers were directly instructed, via email, to not discuss the current election.\footnote{There was “too much election talk” going on at the high school and so the superintendent of the district sent emails asking teachers to not discuss election matters.} With such explicit instructions and my positionality as a student teacher, I followed the examples of the other teachers in the hall: to not talk about politics\footnote{This was a selective repression of politics. While students recited the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, they were prevented from having conversations about the election despite the fact that the results would have direct impacts on their lives. The school rejected the idea of the personal as the political, thereby ignoring the realities of students’ lives.} inside the classroom.

However, when Donald Trump was indeed elected, I realized that something had gone terribly awry in the United States. Before looking overseas to critique and investigate education models and structures abroad, I needed to take a careful look into my own classroom back home—the United States. Despite his belligerent rhetoric of hate and supremacy, Trump was elected to be the 45\textsuperscript{th} President of the U.S. Concurringingly, primary and secondary schools tend to
silence various forms of political expression, which is particularly disturbing as many students of historically marginalized identities are directly affected by the elections and the state violence that follows. In this thesis I aim to ask: How can student narratives break the silence that exist in public schools? Through journal entries and interviews, I analyze a series of different perspectives with the purpose of challenging the production of educative violence and hope to imagine an educative future of liberation and empowerment.3

* * *

During this election season, I was a student teacher at Hope Middle School4 teaching 6th grade social studies. Having been with the class since the start of the school year, I knew each student individually and had been teaching full time for several weeks. To build a strong and accepting community, I led workshops such as the ‘Culture Flower’ and created classroom norms with the class; together we decided that it was important for all of us to be active kindness monitors and to be respectful and mindful within our interactions with one another.

With this as the foundation of the classroom, I felt comfortable discussing various global issues with students and wanted to discuss the current political climate of the U.S. However with class material that needed to be covered and the short schedules, I faced many limitations. Most importantly, I felt restricted by the policy of “not discussing politics.”

From this experience I was reminded that education as it is practiced in many schools today is a violent practice.5 Unable to speak up about what I felt was clearly right and wrong, I

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3 When I first began to write my undergraduate thesis, I had a very different trajectory as to what I was going to write. Originally, my heart was set on investigating the possibilities of peace education for refugees of war and for displaced families around the globe. With ongoing violence in the Middle East, such as the Syrian Civil War, I wanted to think about the nexus of cultural tensions and language politics through the lens of education. By focusing on education that refugees receive, I hoped to examine the intersectionality of culture, religion, and education; analyze the politics of teaching English; and study the impact of peace education on local communities.

4 The names of the school, the school district, and teachers are changed for anonymity.

5 With a history of deep-rooted segregation and the rise of standardized testing, tracking, school to prison pipeline, and school choice (to name a few), education exists within the unequal structures of society.
realized that diverging political views came at the cost of people’s lives. Families would be separated, discrimination would be validated, and yet, schools do not take a clear stance on what they believe and stand for, nor think critically about what they are passing down to the next generation.

Ultimately my writing stems from a tandem of two emotions: love and anger. Like Hanley (2013), I write out of my love as a way to remember the beauty of a smile, the joy of community, and the excitement of human diversity. Secondly, I acknowledge the complexities of global inequality, violence, and power that suppress the value of an individual, thus writing out of anger to resist against the social norms that perpetuate violence against humanity (Hanley, 2013).

**Understanding the Deafening Silence**

During the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States, the hegemonic forces at play silenced a significant opportunity; the possibility of change was lost. Students were left to their own defenses: while some chose to celebrate the continuation of violent global rhetoric, others became fearful of their futures and the futures of their families.

The silence I heard during the months surrounding the election revealed a “fear of talk” in public schools (Fine, 1989, p. 152). With explicit instructions from the superintendent, there was a distinction between desirable and undesirable topics of discussion within school walls. Such unspoken policies and procedures, Michelle Fine (1989) writes, “obscure the very social, economic, and therefore experiential conditions of students daily lives” while students are further expelled from critical thought and conversations (p. 153). The silence ignores and disvalues the daily realities of students’ experiences.
Thus it is important to ask: Who is protected by the silence? How does institutionalized silence recreate power relations of the governing school body? Using Tatum’s (1997) metaphor, the silence is akin to the smog of racism, among other structures of oppression, which all individuals are breathing in; the school administration, faculty, and students are all unknowingly on the conveyor belt of injustice and inequality as the silence grows (Tatum, 1997). Unless schools intentionally seek to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1973), this cycle of silence will continue. Most importantly, schools must recognize that many students have visceral reactions to the rhetoric of violent politics. With their identities on the line—as women, immigrants, individuals with disabilities, and people of color—they have real fears of deportation, hate speech, and rejection.6

**Research Objective and Significance**

The central purpose of my research is to acknowledge and make meaning of the silences in public schools in order to understand how they perpetuate global violence. I aim to situate my research with a critical framework as I analyze student writing samples as well as administration, teacher, and student interviews. With the data that I collect, I intend to think alongside other educational theorists about the possibilities of teaching beyond tolerance (Nieto 2002).7

Tolerance as it is defined today—the ability or willingness to tolerate something, in particular the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with—is not enough. Tolerance alone does not critique or challenge the deep rooted narratives of hate and

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7 Refer to Sonia Nieto’s chapter: “Affirmation, Solidarity, and Critique: Moving Beyond Tolerance in Multicultural Education” in *Language, Culture, and Teaching* (2002) for a further read on teaching beyond tolerance.
inequality. If expectations for students remain at tolerance, Nieto (2002) asks, how will they reach a point of affirming difference, respect, and acceptance?

Additionally, if schools are understood to be places that offer mobility, equal opportunity, and a forum for participatory democracy, the institutional perpetuation of class, race, and gender inequities must also be considered. As the act of non-naming, a form of silencing, alienates marginalized students from their lived experiences, such as their home lives and heritage, I aim to problematize the “normal and natural” social distinctions created by schools (Fine, 1989, p. 159). Silencing students is inherently oppressive and limits empowerment. Though it may be practiced with good intentions on the part of administration and faculty, it leads to dire consequences (Fine, 1989).

Moreover, education is more than just a classroom where teachers teach students. By focusing on the humanness of individuals and the intricacies of consciousness, learning is a tool we use to understand, wrestle with, and challenge our worlds. The significance of cultivating critical consciousness and peace in classrooms is that it first transforms students, then their neighborhoods, then nation states at large. Thus I aim to explore the current political climate within U.S. public schools through the intersecting lenses of human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education.

Many public schools across the U.S. are microcosms of the larger political body. Schools teach, regulate, surveil, and track millions of students to produce individuals who will later then vote, create policy, and fight for a country with a history of generations of perpetuating global violence. Through my research, I aim to investigate, complicate, and develop my understanding

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8 As an aspiring practitioner of global social justice and peace, I am passionate about the power and potential of education in transforming communities all around the globe.

9 This is not the say that the United States is the most evil of all countries but rather a critical perspective of the tangible violence produced by and within the governing body.
of education within the United States; I aim to ask: Can the U.S. public education system cultivate students that are respectful, compassionate, and open-minded during the Trump Presidency? What are the nuances of U.S. politics that are being recreated in schools? How can administrators, teachers, and students challenge the continuation of violence? I write with a hope that education can be a tool for liberation and empowerment.

**Thesis Overview**

This thesis consists of six chapters: the introduction, literature review, methodology, student journal findings, interview findings, and a conclusion. First I provide a framework of understanding through the literature reviews in chapter two. It consists of human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education. Alongside the intersection of the three foundational frameworks, I think through the structures of violence as defined by Johan Galtung. Next I present a comparison between the historical and present-day context of U.S. Exceptionalism and the continual exploitation of hegemonic power and imperial interests.

In the following chapter I present my methodology. Providing a rationale for my qualitative approach, I begin with the context of the case study, then examine the purpose of student writing samples and semi-structured interviews. I work with literature that state writing as a mode of learning and liberation in addition to thinking of creative art as acts of resistance. I also think through important ethical issues of the interview process such as anonymity and confidentiality.

Chapters four and five represent of my data findings and analysis. Chapter four is an analysis of student journal findings: of a collection of 150 students journals, I code fifty writing samples into various categories and create data charts. I also include a specifically chosen set of
six student examples within the chapter to analyze students’ direct response to the election outcome. I include the limitations of coding and what it means for me to create certain categories and omit others. In chapter five I write about the interview findings with subsections for administrative interviews, teacher interviews, and student interviews. This chapter sheds light on the contrasting perspectives of various individuals in schools.

Chapter six argues for the significance of this research, social implications in schools, and what it means to teach beyond tolerance. I situate my thesis beyond the national framework as I think about the relationship between the domestic and the global. I conclude with final questions and self-reflections.

**Limitations**

There are three major limitations that I face during this study. The first is my personal bias and how it affects my interpretation of the data collected; the second is the absence of parents’ voices and the lack of focus on school/home dynamics; and the third is the overall limitation of a single case study in a suburban setting.

A significant and necessary acknowledgement to make in this research is my personal bias. Extremely opinionated and passionate about the topic at hand, I approach the project from a biased perspective—especially when it comes to analyzing data and sharing my personal narrative. From the selection of the six sample journal entries and the coding process, my work and writing is subject to my personal interpretations. I discuss more of my limitations with coding in chapter four.

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10 In form of the letter addressed to my students and how I conduct myself at school. I believe that the personal is the political and recognize that my actions create meanings.
My second limitation is the lack of parents’ voices in my thesis. During student interviews, students were asked about what they hear at home and what they discuss with their parents but the conversation provided a limited window into family conversations. With the blurry line between the spaces of the home and the school, regarding critical consciousness and having politically charged conversations in classrooms, parents would have offered a unique perspective and insight on what they expect their children to learn from schools.

My third limitation is that my research is founded on a single case study. As the context of the school is in a suburban neighborhood, the group of students, administrators, and teachers I interview come from a specific context; this is further discussed in the methodology chapter. If my case study was based in a rural or urban context, my findings may have been different. Thus my research should not be used to generalize all public schools as different localities tell different stories. I acknowledge the danger of the single story (Adichie, 2009) and hope to share my experience of being part of the community in Poughkeepsie.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview of Framework

This chapter reviews and synthesizes texts about education as a tool of resistance. In conversation with past and present theorists, I first clarify the field of education as one rooted within a political apparatus. With interlocutors such as Freire, Dewey, Apple, and Hochschild, I draw connections between the theoretical and the empirical. Secondly, I introduce my central framework of understanding, which is built on the intersection of human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education. This theoretical framework sets the stage for the journal and interview analyses in chapters four and five. Third, I juxtapose historical and current context of the United States to highlight the rhetoric of U.S. Exceptionalism and imperial interests with historical data and current news articles published in mainstream media. Lastly, I work through Galtung’s definitions of violence to make the argument that the current public education system perpetuates global violence.

* * *

Education is deeply political. “Regardless of how much people try to hide that point behind professionalism, nonpartisanship, or abdication to the market,” schools are political spheres (Hochschild, 2004, p. xi). As “one of our nation’s most important tasks is to teach the members of the next generation how to maintain a democracy,” schools collectively reproduce
democratic citizens (Hochschild, 2004, p. xi). Schools are thus microcosms of the larger political configuration with power hierarchies and systematic laws to obey. They are also sites of predestination where structures of silent violence produce individuals to preserve and recreate oppressive inequalities in the United States.

In dialogue with John Dewey’s (1915) pragmatic progressive education and Paulo Freire's (1971) critical pedagogy, education can and should be holistic and centered on the humanity of individuals. Students are persons with organic emotions and interests—they are not mere learning machines. Dewey defines education as the “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1969, p. 89-90). Rather than thinking of education as information to be digested and memorized, Dewey presents it as a meaning-making tool that validates lived experiences. Freire also writes that education “functions as an instrument” to either “bring about conformity” or “the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women… discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 1971, p. 34). Freire’s definition adds a layer of transformative possibility that education offers. Education is as empirical as it is political and theoretical; it creates meaning in the lives of individual students.

Education is also an opportunity for liberation from violent rhetoric, violent action, and violent structures that exist in our present day society. Unfortunately, public education in various global spaces has become a divider rather than an equalizer. In this reality, students are suppressed from reaching their full potential. In the case of the current political climate in the United States, kindness has become a practice that is now considered revolutionary.

Meaning making is a critical factor of education as well. Without relevancy and usefulness, learning is vacuous and alienating. In such cases, students must practice resistance to
fight for their survival, to be seen, and to be heard in a society and culture that places little value on their lives (Hanley, 2013). For students of marginalized identities, the personal is the political and survival is a mode of resistance. Knowing and believing this, many contemporary education practitioners fight for a system of education that liberates and empowers all students.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study relies on three key ideas: human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education. Together, these three schools of thought provide a holistic perspective that addresses historical, structural, and interpersonal injustices. At the heart of the intersection is critical consciousness.

**Human Rights Education**

A Human Rights Education (HRE) framework serves the purpose of promoting human rights and addressing global and localized societal concerns and issues (Hantzopoulos, 2016). It is, however, widely missing from the discourse of education at all levels of the government. The language of human rights is:

“absent educational reform agendas on the local, state, and national levels. Although education mandates historically have been relegated to state and localized government bodies in the United States, the proliferation of federal policies regarding education tends to focus on issues of standards-based reform accountability, choice, and innovation. While there is occasional allusion to democracy, there is no mention of human rights in any major-federal- or state-level educational policy documents.” (Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.17-18)
Founded within the United Nations, more specifically the United Declaration of Human Rights, HRE is defined as “a means to both promote human rights and address larger and localized societal concerns and issues” (Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.17). It is not merely about upholding certain values but also about advocacy to guarantee such conditions (Tibbitts, 2002).

Thus HRE varies in different contexts such as developing countries, post totalitarian countries, and older democracies.

“In developing countries, human rights education is often linked with economic and community development, and women’s rights. In post totalitarian or authoritarian countries, human rights education is commonly associated with the development of civil society and the infrastructures related to the rule of law and protection of individual and minority rights. In older democracies, human rights education is often conjoined favorably with the national power structure but geared towards reform in specific areas, such as penal reform, economic rights and refugee issues.” (Tibbitts, 2002, p. 160)

As Tibbitts (2002) articulates, HRE is situational and local within the global rhetoric. Human rights education also addresses gender equality and economic development, which impacts and plays a role in education—both in terms of access and how it is practiced.

Furthermore, HRE is about fostering and enhancing leadership, for students to take within various social movements; coalition and alliance development, to successfully achieve social change; and personal empowerment, for social empowerment (Tibbitts, 2002). Other concepts of importance include: equality, dignity, non-discrimination, peace building, and people-centered social change (United Nations, 2012). Its ultimate goals are to critically approach education in order to build more just societies and to create a culture of universal
human rights. Doing so often creates welcoming and tolerant classroom communities (Bajaj, 2012; Tibbits, 2002).

Concurrently, there are scholars who critique the idea of human rights as its foundation is built upon Western hegemonic powers. This is because much of human rights in the twenty-first century branches into neocolonialism, cultural imperialism, and U.S. Exceptionalism (Hantzopoulos, 2016). Nonetheless, scholars such as, Sen (1999) and Knight (2005), are among those who predate human rights from Western hegemony, thereby validating the importance of HRE and recognizing it as indigenous to other traditions. Human rights can be reclaimed to the subaltern voices that exist separate of Eurocentric thought.

Baxi (1997) further provides a perspective of human rights that is outside transnational powers such as the United Nations. Baxi (1997) writes that individuals’ critical consciousness are the true source of human rights evident by the continual struggle for decolonization, self-determination, anti-racial discrimination, anti-sexism, environmental restoration, and anti-marginalization of those who are disadvantaged. “Thus, human rights cultures have long been in the making by the praxis of victims of violations, regardless of how rights are formulated, that is, regardless of the mode of production of human rights standards and instruments” (p. 142). At the core of resistance from oppression, human rights is present within all individuals.

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**Critical Peace Education**

As for critical peace education, it is a “field of scholarship and practice that utilizes teaching and learning not only to dismantle all forms of violence but also to create structures that build and sustain a just and equitable” world (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 1). At the core of critical peace education, there are critical pedagogy and democratic processes (Freire, 1972).
Critical pedagogy is rooted in concepts of liberation and transformation as it encourages individuals to use their own experiences and knowledge as catalyst for change in their personal lives and in their social worlds (Freire, 1972).

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it” (see Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.2). By way of introducing the theory, research, and praxis of peace education, Bajaj and Hantzopoulos describe the work of peace education as teaching “about peace as well as to teach for peace” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.3). Thus this field of study is not a mere analysis of education but “an aim to create new forms and structures through curricula, pedagogy participatory learning, dialogue-based encounters, and multiple perspectives on historical narratives” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.3).

With a focus on conflict and post-conflict societies, practitioners write about various teacher responses to direct violence such as drug dealing, as well as mechanisms used to bridge differences within ethnically diverse communities, but what is at the root of all this violence? What perpetuates the violence and how can it be dismantled, not just challenged? With this in mind, I then began to wonder about the violence that is produced and recreated within the classroom spaces of the United States.

Though peace is a slow process that can either take days, weeks, or months to erode old barriers, education and schooling is built into the structures of society (Soetoro-Ng & Urosevich, 2016). While peace can be understood as an independent entity, formal education is dependent on the economy as well as the construction of a nation-state. Economically, many schools exist rooted in neoliberal policies and in a culture where money is king. With schools imbedded in
these structures, what are the limitations of critical peace education? Thinking about the voices of indigenous communities, what are the possibilities of other modes of schooling?

To address this issue, peace education practitioners emphasize the need to interrogate and challenge normative and Eurocentric frameworks to better understand peace and peace education. Thus an important goal of critical peace education is to “uncover subjugated knowledge, challenge normalized truths, and illuminate wisdom from individuals and groups historically silenced” (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.7). In reflection of the politics of English and the nuances of Western language used as a hegemonic force, only very elite communities of global educators have access to this field of study. For the subaltern voices\(^\text{11}\) that do not share a common-language and for educators who have limited access to academic English, language remains a challenging barrier to overcome. Likewise, indigenous communities remain historically silenced as a result of government suppression and limited access to basic rights such as water, hospitals, and schools (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016).

In a chapter focusing on urban violence in Ecuador, Maria Jose Bermeo writes about the lives of teachers fighting to keep their students and themselves safe. Teachers respond differently to drug violence; while some practice modes of intervention such as: “direct avoidance, tacit compliance, and passive neglect,” other responses include “shielding students from immediate physical violence, intercepting illicit transactions, and addressing students’ concerns” (Bermeo, 2016, p.164-165). Concurrently, teachers also wrestle with the tension of identifying children as students, criminals, or victims in context to drug violence in urban settings. It is easy to demonize students, when they use or deal drugs, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to structural violence. In light of such extreme direct violence, how can educators generate a school culture that reflects social justice and coexistence? (Bermeo, 2016, p.172)

\(^{11}\) Gayatri Spivak, “Can the subaltern speak?” (2008)
In this case study by Bermeo on the urban school in Ecuador, she gives a thorough
description of what teachers are up against and raises an important conversation on the role of
teachers both in and out of the classroom. However, a voice that seems to be missing in her case
study is that of students. How do students perceive their teachers? As police officers or a safe
person? With more transparent communication between teachers and students, could a culture of
trust and coexistence be built?

Educational philosopher Paulo Freire ultimately argues that “critical engagement for
social change ‘cannot be purely intellectual but must also involve action; nor can it be limited to
mere activism, but must also include serious reflection: only then it will be praxis’” (Freire,
1972; Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p.236). An example of such praxis is the “Ceeds of Peace”
framework. The goal of this proactive approach to peace building is to “support educators in
teaching children how to be system thinkers, find the intersections between social, political, and
economic structures where peace is possible, and have the critical thinking skills to collaborate
effectively” (Soetoro-Ng & Urosevich, 2016, p.196). Seven key attributes of this framework
include: “critical thinking, courage, conflict resolution, collaboration, compassion, commitment,
and community” (Soetoro-Ng & Urosevich, 2016, p.196). These characteristics are essential
tools for dismantling violence.

* * *

Multicultural Education

Lastly, I use multicultural education as the third framework. Major characteristics of
multicultural education include: antiracist education, basic education, relevant education for all, a
social justice orientation, and critical pedagogy (Nieto, 2002). Within a sociopolitical context
Nieto (2002) defines multicultural education as a:
“Process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the schools’ curriculum and instruction strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principals of social justice.”

(Nieto, 2002, p. 30)

When schools practice this interpersonal approach it transforms the learning experience of many students. Simply stated, multicultural education can also be understood as good pedagogy; it uses students’ experiences as a basis for learning.12 Because our world is interdependent and has become a global village, this is the necessary education model for the changing diverse world (Nieto, 2002).

In conclusion, the intersection of human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education is based on critical consciousness—pedagogy that is inclusive, participatory, and democratic. In its crudest form, education is founded on “official or socially sanctioned knowledge” that is practiced through the banking model, a system in which knowledge is deposited into students, or in other words, empty receptacles (Apple, 1993; Freire, 1970). In contrast to such crude forms, human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education argue that education should not only teach essential academic knowledge and skills but rather create a positive school environment that support the emotional and

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12 Concurring ideas with Dewey & Freire.
behavioral development of students, encouraging them to act on developing school policies that impact their lives and education (Hantzopoulos, 2017).

Present-Day Media Context

Within ten days of being in office, Donald Trump has: signed the Dakota Access pipelines to continue, frozen EPA grants, increased resources for border patrol, ordered an immigration ban from seven Muslim-majority countries, ended federal funding for sanctuary cities, and authorized the first military operation of his presidency in Yemen (Collinson, 2017). This section highlights noticeable changes that have happened during the Trump Presidency; the change in the whitehouse.gov website, increased militarization, the rise of fake news, and contentious cabinet appointments.

An online transformation took place as Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th President of the United States of America. When the whitehouse.gov page transitioned from the Obama administration to the Trump administration, issues surrounding climate change, the Affordable Care Act, and LGBTQ rights disappeared. Instead it was replaced by mentions of a powerful military, a wall between the U.S. Mexico border, and deportations of immigrants with criminal history (Kopan, 2017).13

While decreasing funding in all other federal agencies, the new president is seeking to increase defense spending by $54 billion dollars. With the rhetoric of “public safety and national security,” this new economic budget reflects much of Trump’s hope to not only be better prepared to deter war but to win wars through military force (Fox News, 2017). According to Trump, “We’ve got to win or don’t fight at all.” Moreover, the new secretary of defense, James

13 An interesting factor noted by the Washington Post is the new government repeatedly refers to the new commander in chief as Mr. Trump rather than President Trump on the whitehouse.gov website (Parker, 2017).
Mattis has once said, “You go into Afghanistan, you’ve got guys who slapped women around for five years because they didn’t wear a veil. You know, guys like that ain’t got no manhood left anyway. So it’s a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them.” The appointment of a military general who speaks with such violently charged rhetoric is reflective of the executive branch.

With the new power change, there is also a new series of words used in popular media culture. For example, “alternative facts” and “fake news,” began to circulate on the television and online, via news outlets and social media, that it made its way in to daily conversations. Within the crossfire of chaos and confusion, “experts across the ideological spectrum,” listed a series of events into the category of abnormal and important: publicly criticizing federal judges, making false claims about voter fraud, tweeting about foreign affairs, characterizing the media as enemies, holding national security meetings in public at Mar-a-Lago, having a son-in-law in a senior role in the White House, and ordering an executive order for a border wall with Mexico (Bui, Miller, & Quealy, 2017).

Furthermore the United States has experiences one of the most contentious confirmations for a cabinet position; the nomination of a “wealthy Republican donor with almost no experience in public education,” Betsy DeVos (Alcindor, 2017). With the Senate at a complete standstill, Vice President Mike Pence made the historic tiebreaker, thereby confirming Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education. Based on her records, Ms. DeVos heavily supports charter schools and school vouchers, bringing the neoliberal rhetoric of ‘choice’ to the forefront of education. Across the country, teacher’s unions and many concerned individuals protested the nomination to no avail (Alcindor, 2017).

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14 Seated at a long table next to other military commanders, Mattis told about 200 people at the San Diego Convention Center (Online Article: http://articles.latimes.com/2005/feb/04/world/fg-mattis4)
U.S. politics are present everywhere. Given this fact, many students of all ages are watching, listening, and processing the news. Are teachers engaging in intentional dialogues with their students regarding all that has been taking place in recent months? Whose role is it to education the next generation? Is it possible to do so in a non-bias way that maintains a level of respect, integrity, and kindness?

**Historical Framework**

The rhetoric of hate and exclusion is on the spotlight in the current political climate of the United States may be shocking for some as. Unfortunately, the discourse of hate and fear is deep rooted within U.S. history—this is nothing new. There has been a painful past of racial and ethnic exclusionary policies, American Exceptionalism, and U.S. imperialism.

Historically, education has both addressed contemporary societal matters while providing hope for a better tomorrow (Crocco, Hendry, & Weiler, 1999). Imagining an education that is intentionally progressive, John Dewey (1916) hopes for education to be practiced as “the mechanism democracy would use to sustain and regenerate itself by stimulating social and political reform” (Crocco, Hendry, & Weiler, 1999). However, before moving forward and imagining possibilities for the future, it is crucial to recognize the historical content of education and the politics surrounding education within the United States. Schools have served the role of producing individuals into democratic citizens that will maintain the status quo of U.S. Exceptionalism and imperial interests. Schools are driven with a purpose to “turn individuals into

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15 As well as gender, ability, religion, identity, and class based discrimination.
16 Which was evident from the early days of the nation state through ideas and practices such as Manifest Destiny, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Trail of Tears.
17 Can be defined as economic, military, and cultural influence of the United States internationally.
democratic citizens who will act so that the necessary political, social, and economic conditions persist for future generations” (Hochschild, 1995, p.14)

President Bill Clinton (1993) once said, “There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America.” This quote makes two general assumptions. First, it assumes that America already has all the right solutions and second, that the country is a cohesive whole. Education within the U.S. however is deeply localized.

“Public education in this country is democratic and deeply local. Despite the rhetoric of presidential candidates, it is not the federal government but states and localities that carry most of the burden of public education… School assignments for students are based on local district or community residence; when communities are divided not only by geography but also by race and class, as they are in much of the United States, the schools will mirror these divisions… Local districts mirror and reinforce separation by class and race. Democratic control, therefore, not only provides support for public education but also creates a forum for the occasional exercise of bigotry and xenophobia; localism not only accommodates community idiosyncrasies but also serves as a barrier to changes in the distribution of students and resources.” (Hochschild, 1995, pg. 5)

As a geographically large nation state with the division of state and federal powers, there are limitations of localities. With diverse cosmopolitan cities in contrast to small homogenous towns, there are many obstacles for U.S. public schools to overcome as a collective body.

In writing about post 9/11 New York, a time when most of the U.S. was unified under a collective sadness, Hantzopoulous (2004) emphasizes the need to “deconstruct the ‘us vs. them’
mentality” that is often present during war time politics. Such binaries have detrimental effects on the relationship between classmates and between teachers/students as it induces anxiety and fear (Hantzopoulous, 2004).

During times of conflict, it is critical for schools to counter injustices and negative stereotypes with tolerance. School must be the force that dismantles conflict through activities based in the arts, active listening, problem solving, and conflict resolution (Machel, 2001; Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003). This work will build structures of a peaceful community with characteristics of social justice, respect for human rights, and self-awareness as students.

Additionally, the effects of economic violence and neoliberal policies are visible by the exponentially growing inequalities between rich and the poor. This chasm is a symbol of the adverse state of our global society. Long-standing resentment in many poor countries against the Western powers leads to continuous preparations for war (Reardon, Nordland, & Zuber, 1994, p. 2) and the rise of neoliberal competition is juxtaposed to the growth of domestic privatization (Hursh & Martina, 2002). The effects of the history of neoliberal global capitalism ultimately impacts education structures; there is a decline of critical thought, a rise in the rhetoric of school choice, and the regulation of democratic accountability (Hill, 2006).

**Defining Violence**

The word peace is over-used and often abused. Galtung (1969) defines peace as the absence of violence and clearly makes the difference between violence that is direct and indirect. For example, there is the direct, personal, violence, in form of “torture, war, militarism, rape, and other forms of aggression,” and indirect, structural, violence in form of “racism, sexism,
colonialism, culturally-condoned exclusion,” which privilege some to the denigration of others (Bajaj & Hantzopoulous, 2016, p. 2).

Of the two forms of violence, personal and structural, there is generally a larger emphasis on previous than the latter because personal violence cannot be hidden (Galtung, 1969). “The object of personal violence perceives the violence, usually, and may complain” while “the object of structural violence may be persuaded not to perceive this at all.” Galtung further illustrates that personal violence is not merely ripples but rather waves on otherwise tranquil waters; “it represents change and dynamism” (Galtung, 1969, p. 22).

Contrastingly, structural violence is silent. It is invisible, difficult to see, and static—like tranquil waters. “In a static society, personal violence will be registered,” whereas structural violence may be seen as natural as the air around us (Galtung, 1969, p. 22). Examples of structural violence include: disadvantageous district boundaries that determine school funding, the school-to-prison-pipeline, as well as the insurgence of high-stakes testing. Thus there is an urgent need for the implementation of human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education in schools.
“There are times when personal experience keeps us from reaching the mountaintop and so we let it go because the weight of it is too heavy. And sometimes the mountaintop is difficult to reach with all our resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there, collectively gasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know.

— bell hooks —

Chapter 3: (Alternative) Methodology

Methodology Overview

The primary goal of my methodology is to listen and elevate students’ voices. I take their narratives seriously as political forms of expression. As a means of opposing data-driven testing regimes and school’s suppression of critical consciousness, my methodology leans an ear to silenced stories and voices. I strive for an interpretive appreciation of what middle school students are thinking and processing through modes of writing, drawing, and speaking.

This study uses a qualitative approach to investigate the various reactions of students, administrators, and teachers to the Trump Presidency. Through student journal entries and semi-structured interviews, I attempt to understand students’ perceptions and interpretations of the current political climate. Encountering many diverging narratives, as opposed to modes of coding that suppress internal conflict, ambivalence, and complexity, I hold multiple conversations in tension with one another.

In this chapter, I first present the context of the case study. Second, I explain the process of collecting journal entries and provide the rationale for the value I place on students’ works. Third, I write about the benefits of semi-structured interviews and their purpose. Data is drawn
from an intentional selection of administrators, teachers, and students from Hope Middle School. Participants consist of the school principal, dean of students, the school librarian, a language teacher, a core class teacher, and eight sixth grade students. I, as the researcher, directly converse with the participants offering the full disclosure of the thesis and an explanation of what the interview entails. Full consent has been received by the interviewees and by parents.18

Context of the Case Study

In the heart of a quiet and green neighborhood, Hope Middle School is home to approximately 300 students. The single story building not only has a large library at the entrance of the school but also a spacious high-ceiling cafeteria and large soccer fields in the back. In the hallways, the relationship between the adults and students in the building represents the importance and value of community; the bulletin board with information about after school programs encourages positive characteristics such as integrity, kindness, and honesty; and lastly, the artwork created by students creates a vibrant atmosphere. Overall, the mission statement of the larger school district is to “provide all students with the academic and social skills necessary to pursue their goals and become responsible citizens in an interdependent global community.”19

The ethnic makeup of Hope Middle School is 64.3% White, 12.8% Asian Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian, 10.2% Black, 7.2% Latino/a, and 4.5% Multiracial. This is a clear contrast to the nearby Courage Middle School which predominantly consists of students of color—57% Black, 30% Latino/a, and 9.5% White. As for the socio-economic background of the school, about 24% of students are on free or reduced lunch; district wide, the percentage is about 23%.

In regards to parents and their employment, there is a wide array of families in various

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18 For students who are under the age of 18 and are considered minors.
19 Found online on the district webpage
work sectors. Many of the students’ parents are teachers, principals, professors, doctors, engineers, and restaurant owners. Through the Parents Coffee Night, which takes place a few weeks after school starts, parents are able to meet teachers in a comfortable social setting to build rapport for a healthy and positive school year. A few weeks following the coffee night, teachers host conferences to discuss student’s transition into the school year and to communicate academic expectations to parents.

The examples of the parent coffee night and conferences reflect the importance of parent-teacher communication for a successful school year. Furthermore, there remains a healthy stream of communication through phone calls and emails as well as meetings with core teachers, the school nurse, the psychiatrist, and parents to talk about concerns regarding the student’s health, behavior, and ability to learn. Generally, the parental involvement in the school seems to be very high as many teachers are not just familiar to students with older siblings but to the entire family.

Hope Middle School is devoted to cultivating responsible global citizens, with high academic and social skills. Supplementary to English language arts, math, science, and social studies, students have the opportunity to learn Spanish or French, play instruments, sing in chorus, play sports after school, learn to sew and experience cooking. This holistic learning experience positively impacts the community, as reading, writing, and solving problems are not the sole keys to being a responsible citizen.

**Student Journal Entries**

Post-Election Day, students are asked to write a letter to the new president of the United States, Donald Trump, or to their future selves regarding how they are feeling. Every student has approximately 20 minutes to quietly free write their thoughts; students who finish early are asked  

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20 Based on the district’s mission statement online.
to remain quiet to respect classmates who need more time. Having collected a random sample of fifty letters from students, I analyze the various reactions of students from post-election day. Full anonymity is maintained for all individuals.

The rationale for collecting student journal entries as data is that writing is a mode of learning and liberation (Emig, 1977). I utilize writing as a tool for students to make meaning of what they have been hearing and observing during the political season. Emig (1977) writes that in addition to being valuable, writing is truly unique as it connects three tenses of learning: the past, present, and future. Because writing is also slower than talking, it is a powerful tool of liberation; students are able to share narratives that they may otherwise not be able to share (Erard, 2010). Writing creates a space for students to process and express their own stories.

In chapter four, I also analyze fifty student journals and code various words and phrases that emerge in the students’ writing samples. According to Harrell & Bradley (2009), coding is the act of selecting texts and associating them with particular themes. I begin this process by close reading students journals and finding common themes and patterns. I then create categories and tally the number of times certain words or phrases appear. Once the data is coded, I find patterns among the themes and attempt to understand the meaning of certain themes (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). From these multiple perspectives, I make connections between the crossing relationships of schools, politics, and individual families. From the collected data I draw up common themes and parallels between the role of schools, the thought processes of administrators, and the various emotions felt by middle school students. I chose this methodology because I hope for the students’ journals to make meaning for me without the interruption of my preconceived notions. Accordingly, I was surprised by the wealth of complex, nuanced, and meaningful emotions students articulated.
Interview Findings

Each group—administrator, teacher, and student—has an individualized set of interview questions to answer. Each interview begins with general questions before asking more politicized questions. However, with the semi-formal structure of the interview, the interviewer follows the general flow of the conversation and thus ask new questions and/or omit questions that are previously prepared. The interviewer engages in 30-45 minute individually scheduled interviews for administrators and teachers, and 15-20 minute individually scheduled interviews for students.

Interviews range from a continuum of structured and unstructured interviews; it is a matter of how much controller the interviewer has over the interaction (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The rationale for the use of semi-structured interviews is that such interviews provide “detailed information in a style that is somewhat conversational” (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 25). Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide researchers in depth understandings about the topics at hand as interviewees have the freedom to expand on their experiences or perspectives. Lastly, collecting data via questionnaires and opinions polls are limiting and so interviews are an enhanced practice of gathering (Carruthers, 2009). I use this particular approach because of the power of conversation. Conversations are openings for meanings to be shared and so I chose this approach to be a better listener during the interview process.

Once complete, I manually transcribe the interviews. During the process of organizing the interviews many themes surfaced. Some examples are: student safety, family/school relationships, school curriculum, teacher positionality, common language workshops, limitations of the classroom, and internal confusion within students. In addition to exploring these themes, I look at the class and workshop materials created by teachers and administrators to analyze the

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21 For example, I begin by asking students about their favorite subjects and ask teacher about what brought them to the teaching profession.
underlying message that is being sent to the students. I also think about the possibilities of what more can be done to produce more critical and compassionate students. How does a shared language of bullying and school expectations reinforce positive behavior? How can fact checking and media literacy build critical thinkers?

I also make a note of the ethical issues regarding the process of collecting data. Two key considerations to be made are anonymity and receptivity of the information shared. Throughout my thesis, I maintain the anonymity of all participants of my work. However, maintaining an open and receptive attitude is challenging when participants express sexist, racist, and other offensive views. It remains a challenge to balance between listening without judgment and listening without reproducing or legitimizing offensive and violent opinions (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, & French, year)
“People all over the world are using educational tools to liberate themselves from human suffering caused by direct and structural violence. Where there are conflicts, there are peace educators.”

— Ian Harris —

Chapter 4: Student Journal Findings

Chapter Roadmap

In this chapter I first provide the context of the school day after the election. Second, I attempt to code students’ responses into variety of categories and write about the limitations and implication of such categories. Students’ responses are based on journal entries, of which there are fifty recorded in total. Third, I analyze the select sample of six journal composed by different students.

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On the day after the election, I wanted to provide a space for my students and myself to think, reflect, and process what had taken place in the United States. I held so much tension and frustration that I could not carry on with the set lesson plans for the day. As for the students, there were some who came to school wearing red “Make American Great Again” hats and students who ran up to me with a tearful face asking for a hug. I was at a loss as to how to navigate a space with such a wide array of emotions and reactions. I wanted to be appreciative and open of all forms of expressions but I felt that I did not have the emotional or political capacity to do so.

Thus my directions were simple, “Write a letter to Donald Trump and tell him what you’re thinking? If you would like, you can also write a letter to your future self about how you
are feeling instead. If you do not feel like writing, you are more than welcome to draw or simply sit at your desk and think.” With these guidelines, students had twenty minutes to work quietly.

**Coding and its Limitations**

From approximately 70 responses, I selected a random sample of 50 letters to analyze. Having read each letter carefully, I was moved and surprised by the wide array of student emotions and though processes. First, I organized the letters into three main categories: Pro-Trump, Anti-Trump, and neither. Influenced by media and its polls, I understood these binary categories as the norm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Journal Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro Trump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the three categories I offer, pro-Trump, anti-Trump, and neither, I limit and minimize students’ voices and narratives. After reading each journal entry, key terms were coded to better understand what students were thinking about post-elections. The selection of coded terms are:
“Make America Great Again,” U.S./Mexico Wall, immigration & refugees, race & ethnicity, the voting age, gender rights, life normalcy, un-trust worthy candidates, and moving to Canada.
**Coding and its Limitations**

As I reflect and think about the said categories, it is important to reflect and the processes of creating said categories. Students’ writing samples and doodles spoke in volumes larger than what the categories can represent. Thus the creation of categories reflects the pernicious ways that structural violence plays out within my thesis and my locus of enunciation. The categories have roots that are deep within my personal modes of thinking and should be addressed.

While writing this chapter, I felt the pressures of the absurd political world needing to be processed and organized in a way I was familiar with. With comfortableness of the language used by the media and the rhetoric of Trump himself, I perpetuated the use of these violent categories. My own political orientation has been shaped by the election and I forced students into a box I have pre-created.

The charts above reflect the violent process coding but I hope to allow students’ voices to speak up as a tool for breaking these political categories. Through personal anecdotes, family narratives, and drawings, students are resisting the practice of coding. Despite the desirability of scientific quantification of data, student voices are just as, and sometimes more so powerful.
Content Review of Students’ Letters

Included below are samples of students’ works and reflections about what they thought and felt about the election. Many of the entries were powerful—especially when juxtaposed to classmates who shared opposing viewpoints.

Student 1:

Student one emphasizes the importance of open-mindedness and refers to the U.S. as the land of opportunity. However, the “us VS. them” rhetoric (Hantzopoulos, 2004) is noticeable and the last sentence, “They would make us have more money and take jobs we don’t want,” is telling of the student’s thought process. Martin Carnoy (1989) writes, “part of the socialization is
to make the inequalities, injustices, and hierarches of capitalist production appear as natural consequences of economic and social life and to promote capitalism as the most efficient and just of all economic systems” (p. 4). This reproduces the stereotype of characterizing Asian American and Latin American individuals as working class persons (Carnoy, 1989). Thus student one wrestles with their preexisting hierarchy of individual value and jobs.

Student 2:

Student two, who identifies as a white student, feels unaffected by the election. This is a privileged statement that not all students can relate to. Nieto (2002) writes that “all students are miseducated to the extent that they receive only partial and biased education… the children of working class are deprived not only of a more forthright education but, more important, of a more honest and complete view of our history” (p. 37). She also mentions that European American students only see themselves and understand whiteness as the norm; “everyone else is secondary” (Nieto, 2002, p. 37).

As classrooms become more global, there is a greater need for intentional peacemaking. Qualities of cooperation and allyship are most effective as “working for peace is supported by new pedagogical thinking” (Kovalyova, p. 170). All students, including white students, must challenge each other in building communities of acceptance and respect.
Student 3:

Student three writes a self-reflexive entry that contrasts starkly to student two’s entry. For this student, their identity is on the line and stakes are high as an immigrant. Nieto (2002) writes, “Memories and stories of our past are frequently silenced as we travel through the generations.
This historical amnesia is especially true for those of European descent” (p. 103). Though everyone in the United States, except for Native Americans, are immigrants; many American forget this is a fact. This is a question of who belongs in the U.S.?  

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22 Refer to Sonia Nieto’s chapter “On Becoming American” in Language, Culture, and Teaching.
Student 4:

“Forever” is a powerful statement as is “Make America Great Again!!” Some may even describe these statements as ideology. McLaren (1989) identifies ideologies as a practice of making meaning, and that is what seems to be taking place on this sheet of paper above. Though short, the four words speak loudly and boldly. Physically, the words also take as much space as the previous sentences above.

Student 5:

What others may characterize as terrifying, student five describes as “awesome things.” An avid supporter of Trump, along with friends and family, this student is excited about the election results. Not targeted by the president’s rhetoric or plan of action, the student’s whiteness acts as a safety blanket for their life to continue on with normalcy.
**Student 6:**

In the article, “Visual Culture Jam: Art, Pedagogy, and Creative Resistance,” Darts (2004) argues for a connection between visual culture and contemporary art in relation to social justice and democratic teaching. Thinking about how art can empower students to understand and meaningfully engage with the learning material, this specific cartoon is valuable and unique as it provides a window of insight into student six’s thought processes.

What narratives are being told by: the angled shoulders, the smirk, the eyebrows, and the two phrases that are written are telling? The only two written phrases include, “special hairbrush” and “build a wall.” The first is not a category while the second has been categorized. Thus, what is the meaning of the special hairbrush? Is it the student communicating to the teacher, *don’t categorize me*? The illustration provides a new mode of understanding and brings forth additional questions.

**Making Meanings**

Within a single classroom there are many students of with different contexts and experiences. These students have varying identities and yet come together as a learning community. Is it possible for students to united politically as well? What are ways in which they can practice politics of care (Hantzopoulous, 2017) for one another?

The narratives of the entries break the political silence in the classroom by uplifting the voices of students. However, the narratives are not in conversation with each other—they are only in conversation by the reader, but not the students themselves. How can teachers facilitate spaces for students to be in dialogue for further interrogation of the educative violence?

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23 The author examines the work of resistance theorists and socially engaged artists, including culture jammers, in an effort to support and inform the teaching and learning of visual culture (Darts, 2004).
“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself”

— John Dewey —

Chapter 5: Interview Findings

Chapter Road Map

Chapter five consists of three main interview findings: administrator, teacher, and student. First I provide the interview content of the school principal and dean of studies, Jon and Julie, at Hope Middle School. Then I find common themes and analyze the interview with literary content. Second I provide the interview content of three teachers: Corey, the social studies teacher; Dianne, language teacher; and Sarah the librarian. Next I also analyze their interview. Last I provide the interview content of eight sixth grade students and provide analysis on what they share.

Administration Interview Findings

When I first met Jon, the school principal, and Julie, the Dean of Students, it was clear that they had a great relationship with everyone in the building—both the students and the staff. There were shouts of hellos, check-ins, and high-fives as they monitored the hallway. To better understand the administration’s perspective on the current political climate and their personal beliefs, I asked both Jon and Julie a series of questions regarding school policies against bullying and what they understood to be the role of schools when it came to politics.

Jon first explained that, “a lot of things get termed bullying when it’s not; bullying is much more specific than what it’s commonly understood as.” Because the term is used so
loosely, he believes that it’s critical for the entire school to share a common language to in order to build a safe space of tolerance and respect. Julie similarly responded, “defining bullying is important because people throw the word around without really understanding what the definition is.”

At Hope Middle School, where 40% of the student-body are students of color, Jon suggested that some students “explicitly need to be taught to practice tolerance due to the lack of intentional conversation around race, ethnicity, and immigration within individual families. An initiative that the school has thus taken on is to have a shared terminology. With the support of school counselors and the Dean of Students, every classroom at Hope had an anti-teasing and harassment session. Often led by Julie, she explained that the purpose of having this conversation with students is to create a “protective classroom, promote acceptance and diversity, raise awareness for students, and educate rather than to reprimand.”

Jon further explained that most teasing happens within friend groups and that students are often hurt by jokes taken too far by friends. To clearly distinguish between “Hurtful Teasing” and “Good-Natured Teasing” the school has a set of categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good-Natured Teasing . . .</th>
<th>Hurtful Teasing (May Lead to Bullying) . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Would not hurt other people’s feelings</td>
<td>1. Could hurt other people’s feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Involves a playful back-and-forth between both parties</td>
<td>2. Is sometimes accompanied by showing off in front of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is accompanied by a friendly tone of voice and laughter</td>
<td>3. Continues even when the person being teased shows distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is accompanied by affectionate gestures or expressions</td>
<td>4. Continues even when the person teasing knows the topic is upsetting to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brings people closer and encourages friendships</td>
<td>5. May be accompanied by an angry tone or voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sometimes helps to lighten a tense or angry situation</td>
<td>6. May be accompanied by angry body language, such as clenched fists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With this new teasing initiative being put into use for the second year—with the support of the school psychologist and the school resident office—the administrative staff and counselors have worked hard to build students’ confidence while reinforcing good behavior and character as a close-knit community. Moreover, with cyber bullying rising and Internet safety rising, the school has held an assembly to address various modes of bullying that takes places.\(^\text{24}\)

With a common language shared by students, Jon has seen a change. “Yes, the teasing continues—they’re in middle school—but now we share a common vocabulary with the students where we can clearly distinguish what is hurtful and what is playful teasing. If we had not done this, we would only be putting out fires but not addressing gas cans or the matches.” The main goal of this initiative has been to be proactive about providing students tools to be more self-aware. Jon also noted the importance of communicating with parents of what is being discussed at school for a healthy school-home relationship to be maintained.

On the Wednesday after the presidential election, Jon went “into all of the lunches and referenced the fact that a lot has been talked about in the media lately—especially issues such as race and religion.” He made it clear that Hope Middle Schools “guidelines and behaviors don’t tolerate non-respectful behavior.” However, when asked about whether or not schools should talk about politics, Jon clearly stated “no—not at the middle school level.” He elaborated that “at the middle school level, it’s inappropriate talking about politics,\(^\text{25}\) students can misunderstand what you’re saying and talking about.”

He gave the example: “Let’s say we, as a school, want to have a conversation about Trump’s plan to build the wall… Students are then likely to go home and talk about it with their parents and parents will call…” What Jon was trying to explain was that contentious topics often

\(^{24}\) Especially as every student at Hope Middle School has a Chromebook provided by the district.

\(^{25}\) Despite the talk against ‘political conversations,’ 7th grade students at Hope Middle School go on a field trip to D.C. every year. Thus it is acceptable to talk about government structures and the U.S. history.
have a snowball effect and are talked about out of context. With parents paying for their children to attend school through property tax, many want to keep politics personal and inside the home.

With experience both at the middle school and high school level, Jon believes that current politics should be avoided, with the exception of government classes in high school—where students are more mature. Moreover students should be prepared to engage civically as informed students and thus should be learning about politics their junior and senior year of high school.

However with the unprecedented polarized election cycle, he did indeed talk to students regarding the media while also sending an email to the parents as well. He shared with his student body, “During this presidential election, there have been topics that haven’t been brought
up. Those are important things to talk about; but the school might not be the best place to talk about this.” The reason behind this logic is because Jon prioritizes the safety of his students and believed that by talking about students the school would risk certain students feeling unsafe. “Talking about the Ottoman Empire is safe, but talking about Trump might be unsafe.”

Unfortunately, as seen in the student journals and in student interviews, the election cycle and Trump’s rhetoric had already made students feel unsafe.

Rather than to be against a certain person or an idea, Jon hopes to be teaching tolerance instead. “These past few months,” Jon commented, “everyone was in their own echo chambers.” He also remains faithful to the New York State believing that state policies will protect students and teachers, and as a principal, he hopes to play a peacemaking role making sure to strike a balance and maintaining overall school safety.

From the Dean of Students point of view, Julie is unsure about whether or not schools are the right place to talk about politics. She began with explaining that “The way in which our government and democracy is talked about is problematic. Only 25% if the population actually voted for Trump because 50% of the country did not participate. What’s fascinating is that the majority didn’t vote.” She also strongly believes that “any democracy is going to fail unless its citizen will be unable to participate. At the same time, educators don’t have the responsibility of sharing their personal beliefs. Adults should always turn the question around to ask, ‘how do you feel about the election?’” Or about whatever might be on students’ minds.

As a woman of color and school administrator Julie further shared that “we have a responsibility to each as human beings, and we have a responsibility to observe. When we’re older, we need to participate and act. Students are here in school to learn how to do that.” When having conversations with students she thinks it’s critical to always turn questions back to
students as children often ask questions when they have inner conflict and want a form of resolution. The role that teachers must play is one that provides space for students to think things through, to ease discomfort and resolve confusion, without imposing the adults’ point of view. Julie recognizes the importance of organic relationships between students/teachers as it has lasting impacts for students (McLauren, 1989)

An initiative that encourages positive behavior is ‘student of the quarter.’ Based on students performance, interactions, behavior in schools, teachers select a student from each grade to emphasize the importance of good citizenship. The school will continue selecting students of the quarter in hopes that when you reinforce the positive, you minimize the negative.

According to Julie, “the world of education has four levels: mega, the federal governments; macro, the state; micro, the country; and local, the community.” When asked about the current political world of education, she calmly replied, “by the time that a decision is made in the mega level, it has already changed by the time the decision trickles down to the community level. It doesn’t make a huge impact.” Moreover, “because the one fit model doesn’t work,” communities should make accommodations based on their individual needs. Each unique community, whether it’s agricultural, mining, or urban, has unique characteristics with various needs. Thus when policies are at the mega level, it often gets lost in politics although it may with well intended. Unfortunately, “what’s attempted to be done is often misconstrued and miscommunicated.” But ultimately when it comes to politics “everyone makes a choice everyday whether or not to speak up. When they don’t speak up, that’s when the turmoil begins. The problem is that people do not speak up.”

Remarking that she always has hope for the community Julie shared that “troubled times usually ends up bringing community together.” Because she has “a great deal of faith in our
educators,” there remains a sense of moral compass in schools. Most importantly, she recognizes that the school culture must be founded on trust and safety; students should know that there’s someone on their side. “I can speak from personal experience. When you makes a connection with faculty or friends, security doesn’t become an issue.” Building relationships are key.”

**Teacher Interview Findings**

_Everett’s Core Teacher:_

As a teacher hoping to make a positive impact on his students’ lives, Corey understands his role as an educator with high-regard. The multifaceted job often comes with various limitations and challenges but he loves what he does because he cares so deeply about his students. Post-election in November, he thus was able to pick up on the initial fear felt by some students as a result of Trump’s victory. When asked whether or not politics should be talked about in class, Corey responded, “Yes, because the students we have today will be active participants in the future. Although it seems far away, what we do today will impact what happens in the future. If we can equate voting to being a consumer, why not be politically astute.” As a social studies teacher, he draws comparisons between the curriculum and current events. However he also acknowledges that some conversations can be “misconstrued when discussing at school with students” and what they relay to their parents may lead to more extreme polarization.

More importantly, Corey is a supporter of the Teaching Tolerance material but firmly believes that we, schools, can be doing more. He pinpoints that we’re all afraid of worrying about what might offend students that we don’t ever really talk about what we need to talk about.
Hope’s Language Teacher:

“It’s so beautiful when students understand.” According to the Spanish teacher at Hope Middle School, Dianne, she’s proud of making an impact in her students’ lives. Having been in the education field for many years, she shared, “Education lately has been changing a lot. Before there would be more structure and lesson plans. Now there’s a change in students and in their demographics. We not only are teachers, but, a psychologist, a mother, a policeman, now with the technology, a guardian, constantly. Before society was different, parents were home with the kids, but not many students are lacking structure. So now teachers need to be more in charge. How to act and how to behave… It’s a shame that we can’t talk about manners openly in the classroom.” She then also shared an anecdote from her teaching experience:

“I was teaching Picasso, the three different states of Picasso, in my class. And the principal called me and said that I was telling students that it was ok to be married and have girlfriends by talking about the life of Picasso. Another time we were studying the painting Guernica, which is about war. Again, parents and the principal told me that this was inappropriate in school; they only want to show beautiful things, like pictures and flowers, so they didn’t like the Blue Period of Picasso. This was also during the Clinton presidency when people were sensitive to the scandal—so I think that had something to do with it to. I was also teaching about Boltero. Everything that he draws is fat and exaggerated. Sometimes parents are not educated and when kids go home to explain what it is going on, things get lost. They thought I was making fun of people who are overweight. There is miscommunication.”
“Another time I was teaching Christian songs, because many Spanish-speaking cultures are mostly Catholics, and about Day of the Dead in Mexico, which has connections to Jehovah’s Witnesses, because it’s part of cultures. Kids need to be exposed to different aspects of culture to understand a new language. There are often people who are narrow-minded and disagree. But in general I try to keep going. For another experience, I was talking about Santa Claus, and how he was a real person from Germany talking about St. Nicholas. I got a call from a parent later that day because I destroyed Santa for her daughter. And her daughter was sad and crying because I destroyed Santa for her. There is a lot of ignorance.”

As for recent experiences, she commented that she has “noticed that so many students are talking about the election and are talking about the new president. They are not comfortable that he is the current president. They talk about what is going to happen to people, what is going on with immigrants. They are confused, because are President is not stable. Believe it or not, the kids are listening and they are thinking. At the beginning of the presidency of Trump they were some students that would shout “Trump, Trump, Trump,” but now they are much more quiet about what is going on.”

She also clarified that teachers received an email from the superintendent to not talk about politics because of tensions at the high school. But even “at our school,” she continued, “one student was told: ‘Mexican, go back, get out.’ An email was sent from one student to another. It was presented to the principal; I don’t know exactly what happened. The Mexican
student came and showed me the email when it first happened. I think it’s because I am a safe person for that student.”

Clearly, not all students feel safe despite the silences. Dianne believes that “we need to educate the kids because they are the future and need to understand what it going on. It doesn’t matter whether we [teachers] agree or disagree. It can be done in a right way. And the teachers are the ones who don’t need to take a stance. They need to be the arbitrary voice. We must ask students ‘What do you think?’ and organize and facilitate discussions.” Like the other teachers and administrators, she added that teachers are very powerful individuals because so many students look up to them. Hence, it’s important to not doctrinate but to provide a safe space for students to think critically and engage politically.

_Hope’s Librarian:_

Inspired by students’ enthusiasm and their spontaneity, Sarah hopes to make an impact on her students’ lives. As a librarian she commented, “In some sense, I am here to support teachers in what they do. In the librarian role, I am here to provide resources as a librarian and to create space for the library.” She also recognizes that providing a space, as an educator, for students to work creatively is an essential part of her role.

Unfortunately, there are daily limitations that she faces. “All the paper work and reporting sucks the life out of teachers.” There is not enough time for teachers to prep and “prepare a regular lesson” with meetings and everything that takes place in a school day.

In terms of politics, Sarah firmly believes that “schools should talk about politics because it’s a huge part of our democratic process. And in order for people to be civically engaged, they need to know how to do that.” Bringing up current polarization of politics and Jess Sessions she
commented, “They [students] have to have an understanding when they hear something that they don’t agree with, they need to be curious about the facts behind it. I don’t think people naturally know how to analyze what goes on in the world. It has to be taught. The question is, ‘How do you teach it?’”

Because of the “intellectual war” going on in the United States, students need to be explicitly taught to analyze evidence and “consider what’s going on without the conversation getting heated.” She argues that none of this takes place within schools are students are left to, “mine the uncrawlable dark web” on their own. If educators don’t teach students to discern, “What any politician says could sound true. We place more priority on getting our students to play soccer rather than the politics that our placed in our lives.”

As important “gist statements, main idea, and details are,” they simply cannot be the only things that are taught. She makes the connection back to teachers’ time limitations and how if there isn’t ample time, cross-curricular assignments and analytical thinking will not be intertwined into the classroom space.

Sarah also addresses the fear that schools face, regarding parent push back, but maintains her belief that this is “a bigger problem than one school.” Thinking back to post-election day, she recalls students yelling “Trump” in the library. She pulled them aside and explained, “in the library there are students who are happy and students who are not” and reminded the students about maintain respectful behavior. However, these conversations and discussions about the election should have been taking place before the election, the after. “Engaging in a civil conversation, despite differences, is an important skill to have.”

As a librarian at Hope Middle School, Sarah has been teaching media literacy with ambition to build critical thinking skills in her students. By starting with an idea, doing research,
and then drawing a claim, rather than starting with the claim, she hopes to encourage students to think through controversial topics with the help of reliable sources. She often tells her students, “Go back to the facts. Ask, ‘What are the author’s credentials? Is it their opinion? Can facts be interpreted in different ways?’” She understands this method might not be perfect, but it is a great place to start.

**How to Fact-Check Like a Pro**

1. **It can't be verified**
   A false news article may or may not have links to it. If it does, those links may just lead to a site that's domain may not contain information pertinent to the article topic.

2. **Fake news appeals to emotion**
   Fake news plays on your feelings. It makes you angry or happy or scared. This is to make you react emotionally.

3. **Authors usually aren't experts**
   Some authors may not even be journalists, but laid in the public.

4. **It can't be found anywhere else**
   If you look up the main idea of a false news article, you might not find any other news on the topic or even reporting on the time.

5. **Fake news comes from fake sites**
   You might not come across these domains. They are a list of other URL's are like newsletters.

**Credible Fact-Checking Websites**
- Factcheck.org
- Politifact.com
- Snopes.com
- www.washingtonpost.com/magas/fact-checker

**Vocabulary to Know**
- Bias
- Credentials
- Domain (in a website address/URL)
- Satire
- Sources

**URL Red Flags**
- Ends in .io
- Ends in com.co
- Contains “wordpress”, “blogger” or some other blog creation tool in the URL
- Varies slightly from a well-known website URL

**Sources:**

With Sarah’s guidance, students work on their independent research papers for six to seven weeks covering a wide array of topics: transgender rights, gun control, the Electoral College, chemicals in cosmetics, beauty standard for girls that are unattainable, bottled water vs. tap water, GMOs, bio technology, and many more.
Student Interview Findings

As reflected in the diverse journal entries, it was clear that students’ emotional reactions ranged widely post-election day. Curious as to what 6th graders were thinking several months later, I first began my interviews by asking students about their favorite subject. After having a conversation around their interest and explaining to them the purpose of the interview—to listen to their opinions, thoughts, and experiences regarding recent U.S. politics—I then asked the question, “So, why do you come to school everyday?” Again, the responses ranged from;
students replied, to get an education, to go to college and find a job, to learn, and to make friends—a few students shared that they were forced to come to school by their parents and would much rather have stayed home all day.

When a following, “What do you hope to learn?” was asked, students replied, “to learn stuff that I get to use in the future…to make money for the stuff I’ll need when I grow up, [and] so I can make money eventually and not live in a box.” From all the interviewed individuals, it was evident that students perceived the school to be interconnected with their ability to make money and survive in the coming future; some students also worried about important stepping-stones such as college and acquiring new, necessary skills.

Regarding politics and the head of the executive branch of the government, there was an overall sense of uncertainty and unease when the topic arose. Do you talk about politics at home? At school? With friends?

“My parents watch the news; sometimes I drift in and stay, but not much. I don’t really like politics. Some friends have different views than mine, so we don’t talk about it that much.” (Interview, March 2017)

“Not with my friends. I rarely talk about it at home. But I sometimes ask my dad, ‘Did you hear about the news?’ So he tells me the important stuff. He thinks that Trump is a well-deserved President because he’s been fighting since the beginning; and because he knows what he’s doing” (Interview, March 2017).
“No, I don’t think I really talk about politics. I read about the news on my phone sometimes. There’s a news app on the iPhone but I don’t always use it” (Interview, March 2017).

“Yeah, at home my parents talk about it a lot. I’m usually listening; sometimes I don’t get what they’re talking about. Sometimes I talk about it with my friends but if they disagree with something, it gets really awkward. Now that Trump is president there’s been some disagreements with a lot of different people. And that some people do agree with what he’s saying but some immigrants don’t. I mean, I’m ok either way, but I’d rather that he doesn’t… you know? I don’t really like Donald Trump, he’s not a great person. It doesn’t affect my life that much but I really do hope no wars start. And that everything will be ok” (Interview, March 2017).

“I sometimes read the news on my phone. Either political or celebrity news—nothing too interesting” (Interview, March 2017).

“Not until Donald Trump became president. Some of my best friends are immigrants and they might have to leave. I don’t really talk about it at home, just mostly at school, talking about what Donald Trump is doing” (Interview, March 2017).
“I hope that a libertarian will win the election next time; mostly because I like a lot of their policy on drugs and weapons. The government shouldn’t be involved in everyone’s lives. I’m not sure if people should talk about politics in school, some people might be fine about it but others might not be ok” (Interview, March 2017).

“Sometimes with my dad we watch SNL. That’s something that we do. In technology, before the election, everyone was talking about it—just between students while we were working. There was like a big mixture of students with different views. Different people believe different things” (Interview, March 2017).

From these conversations I realized that many students were not exposed to watching the news nor had experience with having conversations with people who didn’t share their opinions. Though Sarah the librarian has curriculum for the eighth graders, many of the sixth grade students had very limited media literacy. More so, many students were relying on secondary sources, such as friends, family, or social media to receive news. Their political understandings were made up of a myriad of sound bites. When asked, “What do you think is happening in the United States?” this was their response:

“Trump is the new president and he wants to build a wall. He also wants to block immigrants from coming in because they might be terrorists. I’ve heard it on T.V. and I hear my parents talking about it. I hope that Trump doesn’t build a wall
against immigrants because it’s really sad. Most of the immigrants don’t mean any harm but they just want a place to live” (Interview, March 2017).

“All things are changing slowly; Hillary is out of the equation. Trump is making changes. He’s been talking about the wall and banning immigration from the country. I think it’s really bad banning immigrants; Mexico is an ally in the United States. Oh and Hillary was going to change women’s rights in lots of ways” (Interview, March 2017).

“All is forcing immigrant laws and forcing immigrants out of the United States. I think it’s unfair. In some ways, half of what’s going on is understandable. Also, the wall—I don’t like it. I wonder why think aren’t spread more equally. I’ve been to New York City and there are a lot of homeless people but back in our town you don’t see it as much. I hope that there is less homelessness” (Interview, March 2017).

“I think there’s a lot of change of power because Trump is a republican. The common core might go away. I’m not sure how I feel about the new president. He’s done a lot that might be good for the country. I hope he doesn’t build a wall because we’re supposed to be Mexico’s friend and ally” (Interview, March 2017).

“I hope he does get into clean energy project. I think talking about politics can be both beneficial and make some students feel unsafe. If teachers were biased, it
would not help, but if teachers explained and expressed both sides it could be helpful” (Interview, March 2017).

“It’s all going downhill. There’s just this general feeling of downhill-i-ness. I don’t feel safe out of my house sometimes. Especially with the news about Trump teaming up with the Russians. We should stop politics. Stop having school presidents, because if a bully gets elected, that would not be good. I’m not a fan of students government. If I did like it, I would probably be running” (Interview, March 2017).

**Interview Findings**

The power of the administration to silence the election is reverting to the traditional hierarchical student-teacher relationship that is inherently oppressive and structurally violent. Such relationships and use of power within schools perpetuates the “dichotomy of ‘oppressed and oppressor’ in society at large” (Hantzopoulous, 2016, p. 50). “To resolve this tension, critical education insists that the nature of the relationship must transform through critical dialogue so that power—once located solely in the teacher’s hands—can shift to the students, reversing roles so that teachers can validate and affirm the knowledge of students” (Hantzopoulous, 2016, p. 50). By doing so, the existing power dynamic is disturbed and the authoritarian binary is demolished.

Thus the administrators and teachers at Hope Middle School must both be challenged to shift power to the students, which will then naturally lead to critical dialogue. This provides space for students and teachers to rebuild and redefine their relationship—one that is embedded
in critical care and mutual validation. However I do understand that there is a bureaucracy
instilled within the structure of the schools where laws and rules must be followed. When a
superintendent sends out a mass email to the entire school district calling for selective political
silence, teachers and administrators must abide—as their jobs are on the line. Additionally, the
silence may only be deafening to some as others have been normalized into the lack of critical
engagement and find comfort in the status quo of the classroom.

Just as Sarah critiques the lack of critical conversations around challenging issues, Freire
(1971) also writes against the banking of concept of education, labeling it as an instrument of
oppression. If education is truly an instrument for liberation, it must be acknowledge that all
people are incomplete beings whom, through a mutual process of learning, make their attempts
to be more fully human. Because of our normalized understanding of knowledge as power, it is
easy to desire such power then to use it for personal gain once it is attained. “This was of
thinking directly intensifies the crises of our time” (Nordland, 1994, p. 12). The more critical of
our learning that we can practice, we can develop epistemological curiosity which is essential for
a completely grasp of the object of knowledge—a refusal of the banking system.

Schools must “avoid implanting in children the political and ideological stereotypes. It
must contribute to the pupils’ development of free thought and creativity” (Golovatenko, 1994,
p. 160). In other words, education does not purpose to master academic disciplines. Every
subject ought to be a tool for mastering oneself as a person in the society one belongs to. With
such dedication to anti-bullying and anti-harassment at the school, Hope Middle School is
already on the right track for upholding personal characteristics and traits as high as academic
achievement. Most teachers understand well that new approaches are necessary with regard to
content and methodology, especially in history, literature, geography, and social studies. The
most difficult task may be to decide what, and how, to teach about society. How to facilitate conversation when students have opposing view points, how to teach students to read with a critical lens and be in conversation with the learning material.

Reardon, Nordland, & Zuber (1994) write, “it is important to develop preconditions for molding a new political, legal, and ethical mentality…A goal-directed effort by all democratic social institutions is necessary. The most essential among these institutions is the school. What can the school do, and what does it do, to solve this task?”

First and foremost, foundations of humanism, social peace, cooperation, tolerance, a different political, and economic systems must be integrated into the classroom and the curriculum. By rejecting the ideas of sociopolitical or national messianism, “schools should not be places for the training of ‘fighters for a happy future,’ ‘fighters for peace,’ or ‘fighters for national revival.’ Children do not have to fight or struggle; they do not need lessons of hatred; they do not need indoctrination of any kind. So our schools (and educational system in general) need a radical reconstruction. This reconstruction has started, but we are at the very beginning of a long path” (Golovatenko, 1994, p. 161).

The key is to reach a new level of consciousness, a means of self-awareness, that includes the “ability to create a picture of the world; realization of one’s own participation in the world change of development; self-reflection and self-evaluation; critical thinking; ability to see multiple approaches to the solution of concrete problems; respect for other people who have different points of view; and ability to carry on a dialogue and resolve conflicts without using force.” With a diverse classroom and students who themselves are immigrants of sons and daughters, possibly grandchildren, of immigrants, such intentional practice by the school adults in charge is critical. To fight against personal biases and prejudice is that is our social
responsibility to challenge. A high level of intellectual skill in a person comprises not only a
developed intellect, but also a developed system of feelings and attitudes, of which social
responsibility is a vital element. (Kovalyova, 1994, p. 170).

Anatoly Golovatenko (1994) asks the question, “What is social responsibility?” They
further probe, “Does it belong to an individual only, or also to a group, a community, a society?
What are the characteristics of social responsibility in a teenager as an individual? Is the content
of the concept of social responsibility something eternal, or is it changeable? How do concrete
economic, political, and cultural conditions influence the formation of social responsibility?”

Responsibility is not an abstract or foreign concept. The famous slogan, “think globally
and act locally” thus may be misleading as it is necessary to think and act both globally and
locally and to exist in the framework of one’s ability and possibilities, talking all the
opportunities there are. “It would be wrong, generally, to think that responsible thinking is
always about global problems only. A responsible person cannot ignore global problems, but
also cannot give them absolute priority. In certain situations there can even be contradictions
between local and global interests, between an individual and a group, between a group and a
nation, between a nation and humankind, and so on” (Reardon, Nordland, & Zuber, 1994, p.
150).
I do not see any way to achieve a good future for our children more effectively than debating together and working together on how we educate the next generation. Children may be about 20% of the population, but they are 100% of the future.

— David Tyack —

Chapter 6: Conclusion & Moving Forward

Meaning is made in schools. What teachers say, the way students sit, the comments shared in class, the hallway interactions—everything creates meaning. Thus schools are microcosms of the larger society that students will be normalized and integrated into. In other words, most U.S. public schools are training grounds that produce individuals who will maintain the rhetoric of U.S. Exceptionalism, capitalism, neo-liberal policies, and cultural imperialism unless such norms are disrupted and challenged.

Beyond the National Framework

The rhetoric of the global village explains that the world today is much more interconnected than ever before. Unfortunately, those in power continue to monopolize resources and power with the increasing awareness and realization of the limitation of such resources. Such desires for private gain and personal benefit have been a devastating trap for our current lives and the futures; it then breeds a general sense that our ability to direct our destiny is slipping away (Reardon, Nordland, & Zuber, 1994).

Abhorrence of neoliberalism helps explain legitimate anger when speaking of the injustices that we face but the structures of reality are difficult to overcome. Thus Freire (1994) explains radicalization as critical, loving, humble, and communicative. The excess of power,
which has characterized our culture, creates a masochistic-like desire to submit to such power and on the other hand a desire to be all-powerful.

“The age of nation-states, as is well known. Can be characterized in part by its obsessions with security questions. We spend at least as much of our collective energies protecting things as we do creating them. Our geographic borders, our ‘standards of living,’ our ‘national interests’—these and other concerns preoccupy political leaders and the military machines that have supported their policy choices.” (Zuber, 1994, p. 192)

With a new world order that has been discursively coded with new terminology for political economic terminologies—such as post colonialism or post modernism—it is important to recognize that such histories are neither final nor clean (Alexander, 2005). Moreover it cannot be erased or forgotten. The past presents us with a look into the future. Because systems of oppressions, such as colonialism, will undergo through metamorphoses and a change of name, such as ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘school choice,’ we must be critical and ready to have challenging conversations in the classroom.

**Teaching Beyond Tolerance**

Teaching critical consciousness through human rights education, critical peace education, and multicultural education is a form of teaching beyond tolerance. Four prerequisites for effective peace education: unity-based worldview, culture of healing, culture of peace and peace-oriented curriculum (Danesh 2006). As for multicultural education, the practice of it in
classrooms is an act of moving beyond tolerance (Nieto, 2002, p. 258). The most clear way of thinking about moving past tolerance is to think in four levels.

Nieto (2002) argues that there are four levels of multicultural education: the first is tolerance, the second is acceptance, the third is respect, and the fourth is affirmation, solidarity, and critique. With each step, there is a sense of growth and receptivity. Considering the connotations of the word tolerance, it is also important to challenge and ask why schools and teachers are easily content without interrogating the status quo. “Effectively reaching students of all backgrounds means respecting and affirming who they are” (Nieto, 2002, p. 280).

Additionally, educators must undergo a process of self-transformation in order to become effective teachers. We must shift our beliefs, attitudes, and perspective on difference (Nieto, 2002). Diversity is not a dirty word or a temporary problem to be normalized, but rather something to be celebrated. For students to succeed, teachers must be able to speak the language of multiculturalism.

**Final Thoughts**

Violence is everywhere and continues to perpetuate. Its beginning can originate from any corner in the direct-structural-cultural violence triangle and is easily transmitted to other corners. With the violent structure institutionalized and the violent culture internalized—direct violence also tends to become institutionalized, repetitive, ritualistic. We must combat such violence with direct peace, with acts of cooperation, friendliness, and love (Galtung 1969, p.302).

People in rich countries have acquired a life style characterized by buying, using, throwing away. Money and property have become the symbols of rank, marking off as misfits those who do not “make it.” Increasing numbers of children and young people all over the world
expect to grow up as “second-class” citizens; they lose hope in the future, lose the sense of value in their live. People of all ages in such situations tend to seek distraction and oblivion, to get away from themselves (Norland, 1994, p. 2). It would be wrong, however,

“To think that responsible thinking is always about global problems only. A responsible person cannot ignore global problems, but also cannot give them absolute priority. In certain situations there can even be contradictions between local and global interests, between an individual and a group, between a group and a nation, between a nation and humankind, and so on.”

(Golovatenko, 1994, p. 150)

Thus as I learn to practice justice, I attempt to hold many ideas in tension. I think about my students’ journal entries, some that I did not share nor include in my thesis by the request of students to maintain secrecy, and I also think about direct violence taking place in form of war around the world, especially regarding Syria and the refugee crisis. By working on this thesis I tried to find the string that connects all these different points of entry but am not sure if I was successful.

Nonetheless, the process of reading students’ narratives and having meaningful conversations was an important journey that made me more aware and critical of educative politics. Both inside and outside classrooms, there are many violent assumptions and nuances that are overlooked when they need to be addressed. Now that I have purposely sought out to interrogate the silent violence in schools, I aim to teach with my own critical consciousness in full motion.
References


