FREEDOM DREAMING THROUGH WAKING NIGHTMARES: A DUOETHNOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION SCHOLARS NAVIGATING PUBLIC SCHOOLING AS PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

As advocates for public schools, public school teachers, and the promise of public education, we experience tension related to our roles as parents of school-aged children. While our vision of both schools and our own children's education goes beyond "academic" success, a struggle arises at the intersection of our personal and professional roles. With that in mind, this paper discusses the tensions we experience as both teacher educators and parents. Our inquiry took a reflective nature as we worked to gain clarity into and highlight the differences between the pushes and pulls we feel given the intersections of our personal and professional roles. This tension is even more palpable at a time when being critical of public education, even in a loving and productive manner, only feeds its critics and further burdens its exhausted and alienated teachers.

Keywords: Teacher preparation, higher education, lived experience, critical theory

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the tension(s) we experience as teacher educators and parents of school-aged children attending public schools. While we consider ourselves advocates for public schools, public school teachers, and the promise of public education, we are also parents

who are working to ensure positive educational experiences for our own children. However, our vision of (our children's) education goes beyond "academic" success, for we also see ourselves as cultural and political workers, committed to a critical, anti-colonial, and democratic project of public schooling. In our current moment when schools, students, and teachers are feeling the effects of a three-year pandemic; when books are being banned and curriculum is being challenged; when teachers are under an enormous amount of pressure to "control" and "manage" their classrooms (Au, 2007; Vassallo, 2017) and ensure that students pass standardized assessments, it is incredibly difficult, yet increasingly important to explore the intersecting tensions and potentialities between being an advocate for teachers, but also being an advocate for our children. Thus, in this paper, we use duoethnography to analyze our own, and each other's experiences as teacher educators, parents, and community members "that dream for our future/present, alternate nows, [and] elsewheres, that give us the capacity to share intense love, joy, desire, happiness, creativity, as well as rage and fury" (American Educational Studies Association, n.d., para. 2).

The rest of the paper is as follows: We begin with a brief discussion of our positionality, which is followed by a review of the literature in order to frame this inquiry. Next, we explain our theoretical framework, grounded in critical theory and pedagogy, before describing our data sources and methods. We then share our findings and discussion. We end with some closing thoughts that summarize our work and help to move the discussion forward.

POSITIONALITY

We are discussing positionality first, as the layers of our identities are precisely what informed this inquiry. Because each of us have experienced life as K-12 teachers first and then moved into roles in higher education where we prepare future teachers, we have a critical, yet complicated view of teachers and teaching. However, as parents of children who attend K-12 public schools, we have an additional element of identity that complicates the way we experience education on a daily basis.

Prior to her role in higher education, Danielle spent 11 years teaching junior high school. Eight of those 11 years were spent teaching in an area with a large population of historically marginalized students, which is where she developed a much clearer understanding of how inequitable formal education really is. It is at this point that she developed a commitment to social justice and equity in schools, as well as an understanding of how deeply embedded harmful inequities are in the public school system. This understanding is what motivated her entry into a doctoral program in order to better develop leadership skills to address the flaws in the system. With this in mind, Danielle now works to prepare future educators to be transformative teachers in their own classrooms. Additionally, Danielle is a mom to two children, a 14-year-old and an 13-year-old and it is her experiences managing her own children's educational experiences that acted as a catalyst for this study.

Before his current role as an assistant professor in teacher education, Tim spent 11 years as a classroom teacher, mostly in junior high school social studies. His commitment to critical and socially just schools/education emerged from his own subtractive school experiences as a Chicano

attending California schools in the 1990s, and his continued study and experience of the structural inequities that maintain such realities to this day. A major impetus for the project was navigating his own daughter's kindergarten experience. Believing deeply in the power of teachers and administrators to facilitate individual thriving as well as collective resistance and justice, he was quick to understand many teachers did not share similar beliefs. While he knew this to be true as a classroom educator, it impacted him differently as a parent/professor.

Moreover, as we shared a version of this paper at a conference, we realized additional layers to our positionalities that influenced our conceptualization and analysis. Having both grown up in working-class families, we were not used to recognizing some of the privileges we now have in navigating our children's education. For example, even if we disagree with and/or critique school policies, we still generally feel welcome in school spaces. We are both English speakers, and U.S. citizens, and have flexible work schedules that allow us to attend conferences, meetings, and events. We have knowledge of tools such as email, devices, and education technology that facilitate communication with teachers and administration. Thus, we wondered if we felt the navigation of our roles as teacher educators, professors, and parents to be more tenuous because we now inhabit positions of privilege we did not experience as children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In their edited volume, *On the High Wire: Education Professors Walk Between Work and Parenting*, Dotger et al. (2015) lead with a series of simple questions, "as education professors, are we still at work when we are at our child's school?... When we email our child's teacher, when we go to a district meeting about school redistricting, are we working or parenting?" (p. xi). The publication of the aforementioned text (and the additional literature we share) suggests that (education) scholars have found such inquiry of academic value. Moreover, given the current reality in which public education has been (re)weaponized by the political right to maintain white supremacy (e.g. Barber, 2021; Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2021; Ray & Gibbons, 2021) we feel such questions of how to be a K-12 parent and a community-engaged, anti-racist faculty member will only continue to merit practical and academic investigation (Montaño & Martinez, 2021).

Throughout the academic literature about parenting and (education) professoring, a common thread emerges, namely, that the positions of academic and parent are often at odds (Theoharis & Dotger, 2015; Godley, 2013). Cann (2015) describes this positionality as one between the heart and the mind, "a constant struggle to make choices between political beliefs, academic knowledge, and parental hearts" (p. 38). Histories of intersectional oppressions further layer such nuanced tension. For example, in Chapter 1,[1] "It takes a village . . .a Facebook village: On advocating for my Black son" of the aforementioned Dotger et al. (2015) book, one author discusses multiple overtly racist incidents regarding her son and acknowledges that as a university professor, she has unique levels of political and social capital to deal with these situations. Still, she wonders, "How do I advocate for my child in ways that do not further marginalize the other students? How can my actions work to improve conditions for all members of the school community?" (Dotger et al., p. 8). Similarly, the author of Chapter 28 outlines a pattern of

inaccurate teaching of racial and ethnic topics, as well as general discomfort in approaching LGBTQ+ families and issues, at their child's school. The author (of Chapter 28) recognizes the fact that directly confronting school leaders and teachers often causes alienation and strained relationships, so building bridges and alliances is crucial. Still, the author feels a "moral obligation to work in schools as an educational activist" (Dotger et al., 2015, p. 231) and highlights how the directness of such problems in schools constitutes a "call to action" (Dotger et al., 2015, p. 231) for scholars and academic inquiry.

This "call to action" appears all the more palpable at a time when being critical of public education, even in a loving and productive manner, only feeds its critics and further burdens its exhausted and alienated teachers (Anand & Bachman, 2021; Monreal & McCorkle, 2022). Thus, more recent scholarship by Montaño and Martinez (2021) frames this line of research in terms of freedom dreaming (see also Love, 2019). In their own reflections of parenting through pandemics they write it is an opportunity to freedom dream, "[to] push ourselves in raising our children, demanding of our schools, and the future teachers and leaders we train" (Montaño and Martinez, 2021, p. 151). Thus, in conversation with the approach, we (Danielle and Tim) "engage in dreaming and imagining what may seem out of reach, but what needs to be accomplished" (Montaño and Martinez, 2021, p. 151). We aim to join the above scholarship that highlights the pushes, pulls, paradoxes, and privileges of being an education scholar for social justice while participating in a system designed to reproduce social inequality (Cann, 2015; Godley, 2013; Lowenhaupt & Theoharis, 2021).

A related, but slightly different line of scholarship takes up the pushes and pulls of being an education scholar (for social justice) by discussing boundaries in terms of work-life balance. For example, in the Dotger et al. (2015) text, the author of Chapter 18 asks a very simple question: "Is this a job that would allow me to be a good dad?" (p. 157). During various academic job interviews, he (author of Chapter 18) receives mixed signals pointing toward how being a parent and being an academic is incredibly difficult for myriad reasons. This author writes, "the times when our children are young often coincide with professional periods that require tremendous attention to our professional productivity and profile, as junior faculty advance along the career track toward promotion and tenure" (p. 160; see also Lowenhaupt & Theoharis, 2021). He also wonders how a necessary focus on critical scholarship intersects with becoming 'those parents.' Pointedly he writes, "As parents, the challenge is in knowing when expressing our beliefs will create difficulties for our children at school. The jury is still out on this one" (Dotger et al., 2015, p.163). Still, he believes it is necessary to sometimes separate his role as a teacher educator from his role as a parent, a position that many researchers (including us) feel is nearly impossible.

In sum, the above research shines light on the complexity of the present moment – hopes of promising change and racial reckoning that gave way to "settler colonial retrenchment, the assertion of white political dominance, and conservative backlash" (American Educational Studies Association, n.d., para. 1). Moreover, we feel it essential to re-examine the tensions we experience as parents who actively support the work of teachers *and* are part of a system as parents and teacher educators that too often reproduces White supremacy and settler colonialism (see for example,

Calderón & Urrieta, 2019; Hatt, 2012; Horsford et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Sabzalian, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAME

Given our stance as critical educators who support the project of public education, we use a general framework of critical theory and pedagogy to guide our inquiry. This allows us to understand education as a tool of power and political act/ion. To further draw upon the effects of education as a power-filled (and power re/producing) political project, we discuss scholarship that highlights how schools (re)produce ideas of normative behavior. In particular, literature on critical classroom management and critical disability studies demonstrates how school (behavioral) norms are classed and raced.

We begin from the position that schooling and public education projects have been used to reproduce unequal and unjust social hierarchies (Friere, 1970). In the words of McLaren (1994), "Critical theorists [of education] begin with the premise that men and women …inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege [and] knowledge acquired in school is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways" (p. 175). This overarching starting point speaks to the tensions we feel in knowing the power and privilege we have as teacher educators, and how this complicates our interactions with our children's teachers and schools. We know and understand the layers of schooling, how schools are structured, and how/why some knowledge/skills/behaviors are more valued than others in school settings. We also struggle, as this knowledge of the reproductive nature of schooling often means we can use it to draw upon opportunities for our own children (see also Godley, 2013). Put another way, even as we believe that "teacher education should be inexplicably linked to critically transforming the school setting and, by extension, the wider social setting," (p. 438) we must contend with the fact that our knowledge of school systems will more than likely benefit our own children.

We also believe education is a place where hegemonic understandings of achievement, success, and opportunity get reproduced in the form of "common sense" practices that often go unquestioned. These "common sense" practices easily make their way into classrooms through leadership, power, and the unquestioned dominance of certain ideals. One such example of how hegemony succeeds through legitimizing norms and ideas in school is the discourse of classroom management. Leaving aside the increasing reality that managing students (and/or their environments) has become an, maybe even *the* overriding concern for teacher candidates and teacher educators, Vassallo (2017) discusses the need to critically evaluate the assumptions and ethics of 'managing' students. To this point, Vassallo (2017) discusses how both explicit conditioning of students (behaviorism) and seemingly progressive uses of cultural responsiveness and/or socio-emotional learning are actually geared toward the same end, knowing and understanding students in order to change their (poor/deviant) behavior. This deficit-based perspective has the ultimate goal of "render[ing] students amenable and adaptable to schooling structures by shaping behaviors *deemed* appropriate," (Vassallo, 2017, p. 134, emphasis ours) rather than involving students in the democratic process of cooperative (learning) community

building. Thus, classroom management, especially the unquestioned idea that students must be "observed, measured, evaluated, and judged" (Vassallo, 2017, p. 137) is really about fixing students, norming behavior, ensuring compliance, and justifying ranking(s). Research in critical race and disability studies extends this line of thinking to center on how the (schooling) power to categorize and 'normalize' certain types of behaviors (and ability) intersects with racism and is both based on and furthers the project of white supremacy. Thus, we must question the racialized lines between 'regular/normal' students, knowledge, and behavior in addition to how such lines are continually recreated and who has control over how these lines are drawn (Annamma et al., 2013).

Central to the research at hand, we must then critically reflect on how and when we might use power to disrupt the unjust effects of such educational structures. Drawing from Maxine Greene (2009) we look inward "against such a background…to go in search of a critical pedagogy of significance" and to locate "the sources of questioning, of restlessness?" (p. 434). We view our experiences (both as parents and as teacher educators) through this lens of personal critique paired with Greene's (2009) reflexive "passion of possibility" (p. 84). It is no surprise then that Greene speaks to the work of Freire when she writes that a democratic and loving social vision does not match our current democracy. Moreover, all too often, a critical and loving vision of education does not match our current structure of formal schooling. Hence this project aims to question and critique, not only the hegemonic practices we are observing in our own children's formal education but also to reflect on our own practices as teacher educators (and how they might intersect with hegemonic ideals). It is at this place of restlessness we find ourselves - critical of educational structures in general, but walking that "high wire" between parent and educator. Importantly, we are not simply navel-gazing here but rather critically interrogating our own sources of questioning in order to forge new ways forward for us as advocates, (teacher) educators, and parents.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

In order "to delve deeper into a common area of interest" (Fallas-Escobar & Pentón Herrera, 2021, p. 3) — the intersections of being a public school parent and critical teacher educator — we describe our duoethnography methodology. At a basic level, duoethnography (Docherty-Skippen & Beattie, 2018; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012) extends autoethnography (and other currere self-interrogation[2]) to another, and the/our selves become the site of the research (Breault, 2016). Our inquiry took on a reflective nature as we worked to gain clarity into and highlight the differences of the pushes and pulls we feel given our personal and professional roles and the ways in which they intersect. Given that duoethnography is polyvocal and dialogical (Breault, 2016), it allowed for us to both merge and untangle ourselves and our experiences, creating a layered text (of ourselves) that allowed us to look at our experiences through a critical lens in order to better understand how to navigate these struggles. We used the following three steps to explore two research questions: (a) How do our roles as education scholars and parents conflict at certain moments? and (b) How do we, as parent-scholars, navigate these moments of tension and conflict?

- **Step 1:** After mapping the academic literature (see above) and focusing our research questions, we independently wrote 3-4 brief vignettes (~300 - 500 words) about specific moments of personal conflict (as teacher educators and parents). We then shared these vignettes with each other. After exchanging our vignettes, and reading them, we engaged in an open-ended conversation/interview where we sought to interrogate similarities and differences in our experiences. We recorded the conversation for transcription through Zoom video technology and wrote analytic memos.
- **Step 2:** For an added data source, we independently chose 3-4 artifacts (pictures, messages, assignments) to share with each other. Similar to step 1, we engaged in an open-ended conversation/interview where we sought to interrogate similarities and differences in our experiences. We recorded the conversation for transcription through Zoom video technology and wrote analytic memos.
- **Step 3:** *Analysis and Coding*: During the reading of the transcriptions, overt and covert categories were utilized as a way of analyzing the conversations. Carspecken's (1996) concept of low-level coding was used to help generate simple descriptive themes and patterns that were found throughout the conversations, pictures, messages, and assignments. These themes acted as overt categories. Following this low-level coding, we again analyzed the data using high-level codes that required interpretation in order to determine covert categories.

FINDINGS

After working with the data, four main themes emerged. The first theme was the thread of obedience and compliance in the classroom and how the hegemony of school practices causes issues in both of our homes. The second theme was the push and pull of our identities as parents and our identities as scholars in regard to how we can use our position to fight for increased equity and provide opportunities for our kids. The third theme again focused on our identities; namely, when to intercede in a situation and when to "pull the professor" card. The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data was the balance between supporting classroom teachers while also working to improve teaching practices. Interestingly, all of these themes also fell under one big umbrella: how do we - as parent scholars - avoid looking like we are attacking teachers, especially in these (political) times?

Compliance and control: "So even though we're like, we don't dig it, they love it."

For both authors, this idea came up frequently, especially as it pertained to rewards or "classroom management" strategies. Class Dojo,[3] a digital behavior management and parent communication application in which students are assigned brightly colored monster avatars (see Garlen, 2019), for example, was a point of contention in each of our households, but especially in one home, where there were tears over not downloading the app. Tim shared, "My wife and I reiterated that we understood [her/our daughter] but did not think it [Class Dojo] was best for her

or the class. She grew more agitated and angry, finally crying and screaming, 'I want you to get the monster app. You need to see my monster.'" Despite explaining a concern that the app was being used to describe (even create) kids as "good" or "bad" in the classroom, our stance went against the teacher's advice. To a kindergartner, what matters is what the teacher says, what the teacher is asking them to do, and the emotions that come when Mom and Dad are not on the same page as the teacher. As a parent, how does one take away something that a child loves (like building her monster on an app) simply because the scholarly side of that parent is not in agreement with it? Moreover, in the current context of attacks on public education and curriculum under the guise of 'parent's choice', how might a decision to disagree with a teacher be read?

A similar situation occurred in the other home when a child came home talking all about 'brag tags.' These brag tags were exactly what they sounded like - a set of tags on a ring, with each tag signifying something to brag about, such as 'stellar for the sub' or 'quiet in the hallway.' It should be clear that the bulk of these rewards are based on compliance and control (not only by the teachers but panoptically by/with classmates), concepts, and practices which are normalized in schools on a regular basis. In this particular instance, the brag tags were displayed at the front of the room, for anyone who was in the classroom to see. At the end of every quarter, the student with the most brag tags got to be "teacher for the day," a huge, visible reward that placed one student in a position of power over the others. While Danielle's daughter was absolutely over the moon because she earned enough brag tags to be the teacher for the day, the struggle at home was very real. As a scholar, the entire (mundane) spectacle of the tags, the behaviors for which they were rewarded, and the public nature of everything was all unsettling. But as a parent, the look of pride on her daughter's face was difficult to push back against. Again, the issue of how to balance resistance to practices centered on compliance, control, and (self) surveillance as a scholar, versus not crushing the happiness of a child felt nearly impossible.

Inequitable practices: "I just constantly return to this question of, why aren't these opportunities there for everybody?"

As public scholars who support more equitable conditions and opportunities in schools, it was not necessarily a surprise that this theme emerged from the data. However, what was interesting was again, the places at which our identities intersected. For example, when we see an issue in our child's classroom, we want immediate change, we want answers. On the other hand, as educators, we know how slow any kind of real, structural change can be. Our struggle remained how to "fix" whatever issue was occurring for our children while also questioning what we could do in our positions to fight for increased equity in order to provide not just opportunities for our own children, but for other children as well. Tension emerged as we recognized that absent the large structural and policy changes necessary to make schooling more equitable, we have decisions to make with our children in the present. We must contend with how our individual decisions could possibly conflict with the larger changes we advocate for in our teacher education classrooms.

For example, Danielle has a son who has chosen to attend a 'specialty' high school within his district. To attend this high school, students must first apply, then sit for a test, then participate

in a Socratic seminar, and then wait to see if they were admitted. The school admits just 100 students per year based on a lottery system. Essentially, it does not matter if a student placed first or last on the assessments; if a student passed the tests, they were put in a lottery and 100 names were drawn. Now that the school year has started, the vast differences between the curriculum and pedagogy at the specialty school versus the curriculum and pedagogy at the 'regular' schools are astounding. This made it difficult to shake the uneasy feeling that one of our children was the beneficiary of the wildly different opportunities across the district. Again, as a parent, of course, the desire is there to be excited and celebrate the road ahead, but as a scholar, the critique exists in regard to how differently students are being served based on categories of ability and difference. This situation is in line with an experience Tim had at an institution where he worked. His colleagues were shocked that he would send his children to the city's public school district, implying he was disadvantageous to his own children by not looking for 'better schools.'

When to speak up (as a professor): "I mean, I won't lie. There've been times I've deliberately sent emails from my work email."

Despite a genuine belief that our teacher candidates take our instruction toward and passion for equity into their positions, we also know that the current educational climate has successfully stoked fear amongst many beginning practitioners.[4] Still, we both shared how difficult it was to see certain practices continue in our children's classrooms, and at what point we "pull our professor cards" to wield whatever power comes with our educational credentials. In one example, we discussed what to do when our children - because of unchallenging and antiquated pedagogical strategies - came to dislike portions of school. We discussed how we always assume the best but are motivated to action if things do not improve. As such, after months of one child being miserable in math, Danielle sent an email asking what could be done to help challenge her son, even offering her old materials from teaching higher-level math. After the teacher assured Danielle that he was working on differentiating instruction, he created a packet of worksheets and sent a few peers into the hallway each day. Sitting in the hallway, filling in blanks with one another became the extent of differentiation. In another instance, Tim shared his reactions to seeing the 'library' in his daughters' kindergarten classroom:

> I glanced at the titles. Lots of older books, Scholastic promotional materials, and texts about animals…not a single book that centered Latinx characters, people of color, non-Western cultures, LGBTQ+ families/communities, or issues of dis/ability…I wondered how this school, in a relatively well-resourced district with a majority students of color, did not have more representative texts. I did not want to "flex" the professor card, but also didn't feel this was acceptable. My wife and I decided to buy half a dozen children's books and send them as a "new school year gift". I am not sure what happened to those books, but we received a thank you card.

As we discussed this particular vignette, we oscillated between disappointment in the individual teacher, the school, the district, and teacher education. Even though it was the teacher's

first year, we both wanted to believe that her teacher education would have emphasized the need for inclusive children's books. Additionally, this shouldn't have fallen on the teacher's shoulders alone, the school should have explicit supports in place to help a beginning teacher build a library that reflects the critical, anti-racist, and culturally responsive education all students should have access to. It was clear that this was not a pressing concern or point of concentration of the teacher or the school, and as such we wondered if speaking up as a professor from a local university would change things. We also discussed how such critique, even if framed in a supportive manner, might lead to retributions against our child and/or our department, especially as leadership from the university often cautioned about appearing "too political" and jeopardizing important relationships with schools and districts. Even after much discussion, we were left feeling uncomfortable and as though we do not have the answers in regard to how to handle these types of situations in the future.

Challenging norms: "I don't ever want to feel like I'm attacking a teacher . . but when you see these really horrible practices . . ."

Given our positions as (education) faculty we are effusive in our support and admiration of classroom teachers. At a fundamental level, we believe that teachers are the experts in/of their classroom, that they are (more than) qualified professionals doing amazing work in complex situations, and that they, too, are motivated by a belief in children and transformative change (see also Schneider, 2022). And while counter-examples or cases exist, what happens if that 'n of 1' is your child's teacher? What if an otherwise good teacher engages in unjust and/or inequitable practices? How do we balance our support of public school teachers/teaching when we see areas that might need improvement? As Danielle shared regarding one conversation with her child's teacher, "He was full of nothing but griping about 'students these days' and how awful they are, etc. It was disheartening to hear an educator talk that way, but especially an educator my child spends so much time with daily."

As the previous three themes and our theoretical frame demonstrate, many of these practices and rationales are wrapped in hegemonic norms that are structured into the way school reproduces inequality. Thus, we discussed how important it was that critical educators interrogate the unquestioned ideas that schools must fix students, norm behavior, and ensure compliance, rather than levy blame on the individual behaviors of teachers. Returning to our conversations about the digital behavior management and communication system ClassDojo, we felt it was necessary to highlight the assumptions behind behaviorist classroom management schemes that implicitly created ways of thinking about other students. We knew that teachers were encouraged, often by mentor teachers, colleagues, and administrators to engage in such systems. Thus, Tim was just as concerned about the individual atmosphere of his daughter's classroom as with a school space that rested on such manipulation of kids' behavior. In such a reality, it is important to engage school leaders and make sure they understand how such normative thinking about classroom management intersects with deficit (and White supremacist) views of religious, racial/ethnic, linguistic, and economic differences (Hatt, 2012). Calling back to Dotger (2015), such discussion

may provide an opening to advocate for what's best for our own children "in ways that do not further marginalize the other students and improve conditions for all members of the school community" (p. 8). In sum, we came to realize how important it was for us as parents/professors to critically discuss these issues as a larger phenomenon that needs to be addressed at the school with administrators and school officials (rather than individual teachers).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Taking the time to investigate the tensions between our identities as parents and our identities as scholars has proven to be a valuable experience. Not only has this project highlighted some enduring tensions that have been identified in previous literature (Godley, 2013; Theoharis & Dotger, 2015), but it has also acted as a catalyst for us to engage in a more critical (self) analysis, one rooted in a reflexive passion of possibility (Green, 2009) that encouraged us to freedom dream towards more critical, democratic teacher education. This dreaming can start by critically reflecting and engaging with ideas that consistently emerged throughout this inquiry, in the hope of moving toward action.

One main idea that we both grappled with was illuminated in the literature and the data; namely, "How do I advocate for my child in ways that do not further marginalize the other students? How can my actions work to improve conditions for all members of the school community?" (Theoharis & Dotger, 2015, p. 8). As parents and as teacher educators, this is worth teasing apart. One on hand, as parents, of course, we want the best experiences for our children. This includes a rich, inclusive curriculum that allows for critical thought and freedom in the educational setting. But on the other hand, when we know that those opportunities are not available to all children, how do we ensure that advocating for our own children does not indirectly further marginalize other children? How do we provide thoughtful critique of the educational system (and thus, teachers' role in maintaining it) without making working conditions worse?

This concern over a perceived critique of teachers runs parallel to a second issue that emerged from our themes, which was a continued delicate dance around how to support teachers while also illuminating hegemonic structures that inform some of the critical decisions we are trying to make, both as educators and as parents. In all of our conversations and communication, we never quite arrived at how to successfully perform this delicate dance, although some evidence from the last theme points to the need to have critical discussions with administrators. It appears further research is needed in order to make sense of how our layered identities as parents and scholars play a role in how we approach questioning the harmful, hegemonic practices that we see in schools - both in our children's schools, as well as in university partner schools.

A final point of discussion is recognizing that most deeply rooted in this passion of possibility is structural change paired with a deeply personal praxis meant to challenge Schools of Education. These are the sites where pre-service teachers and in-service teachers need to be engaged in critical conversation and discussion. If institutions of higher education are not making clear the need to advocate for all children and the need to challenge hegemonic practices, how can anyone be surprised or disappointed when real change is not occurring in classrooms? The reality

is that pre-service teachers leave the university and are often met with a fork in the road: follow what their school mentors or peers or administrators suggest (even if antiquated or harmful) or implement what they learned in the teacher preparation courses, sometimes completely on their own. New teachers have so many stressors in their first years of teaching, that appearing to be the only one enacting transformative practices can end up feeling like too heavy of a lift. As Schools of Education, what can we be doing better in order to challenge the current systems so that new teachers do not feel this way? In our mind, this means more longitudinal support for new teachers as well as some type of continuing critical education for principals, mentor teachers, and district officials. To these ends, Danielle is in the midst of a (freedom dreaming) research project investigating new teachers and their levels of self-efficacy as they pertain to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, early data indicates that many new teachers do, in fact, quickly fall back on the practices of their mentors or their new peers, even when they know these practices are not in line with what they just learned in their teacher preparation programs.

In closing, like most research, this project yielded just as many new questions as it did answers. Our experiences as parents, K-12 teachers, and now teacher educators inform our lived experiences and frame how we approach both parenting and teaching. This speaks to what Theoharis and Dotger (2015) describe as ". . .experiences of education professors who often have practical/lived experience working in K - 12 schools as well as scholarly expertise about aspects of K - 12 schools. These two experiences, together with their role as parents, make for a different relationship and real tensions as these faculty work in both professional and parental capacities with K - 12 schools" (p. xv). These tensions, while difficult to navigate, have brought us to this point in our inquiry, where we wonder if this type of reflective research might lend itself to Michelle Fine's (1994) definition of activist research, which includes four main strategies: "breaking the silence", "denaturalizing what appears to be natural", "attaching what is to what could be", and "engaging in participatory activist research" (p. xvi). Is it possible that these waking nightmares have provided the catalyst we needed in order to immerse ourselves more fully in activist research, both for our own children and for all children in public schools? For we cannot allow this moment to push schooling further away from the very freedom dreams we hold for the project of public education.

Endnotes

[1] Notably, individual chapter authors from Dotger et al. (2015) are anonymous to avoid any potential repercussions, either to the teachers involved in the vignettes or to the professor who shared their stories.

[2] Currere is a critical form of autobiography and curriculum studies forwarded by Pinar (1975).

[3] Proponents of Class Dojo cite its relative popularity among educators, its ability to track behavior, and its potential to increase parent communication. Critics of digital management systems like Class Dojo focus on student data concerns, behavioral manipulation, and constant (self) surveillance (see also Garlen, 2019; Scott, 2012).

[4] It is important to note that while the fear from many educators is real, so too, is a reality that teachers of color share disproportionate risk when centering issues of social justice.

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