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Fear, Hesitation, and Resistance: Georgia Educators' Responses to Divisive Concepts Legislation

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Abstract: Currently, attacks on CRT and neoliberal legislation work to undermine public education and democracy in the United States. Divisive concepts legislation restricts what teachers say and do, acting as a counterwave to implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. In this article, a collective of educators with diverse identities working in varied

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contexts engage in collaborative reflection on the impact of HB 1084 (a censorship policy in Georgia), on their educational practices. We generated vignettes and coded them for the degree to which we reacted with fear, hesitation, and/or resistance. Our responses existed within this set of reactions and were influenced by our identities, constraints/affordances of our contexts, and experiences. Our vignettes expose how the legislation subjected us to a surveillance state that sometimes produced fear and hesitation, especially for those in positions related to preservice teaching. However, resistance was also present in response to the legislation in almost every vignette. Implications emerging from this study include the importance of educators engaging student voices as a form of backup and the necessity of coalition building for critical teaching. Findings suggest policies like HB 1084 undermine culturally relevant, antiracist, justice-centered teaching and are fundamentally regressive to improving the public school system.
Keywords: educational legislation; censorship; reflection on practice; resistance; neoliberal policies

Miedo, vacilación y resistencia: Las respuestas de los educadores de Georgia a la legislación sobre conceptos divisivos

Resumen: Los ataques actuales a la teoría crítica de la razón (CRT en inglés) y a la legislación neoliberal contribuyen a socavar la educación pública y la democracia en los Estados Unidos. La legislación sobre conceptos divisivos restringe lo que los docentes dicen y hacen, actuando como una contracorriente a la implementación de iniciativas de diversidad, equidad e inclusión. En este artículo, un colectivo de educadores con identidades diversas que trabajan en contextos variados participan en una reflexión colaborativa sobre el impacto de la HB 1084 (una política de censura en Georgia) en sus prácticas educativas. Generamos viñetas y las codificamos según el grado en que reaccionamos con miedo, vacilación y/o resistencia. Nuestras respuestas existían dentro de este conjunto de reacciones y estaban influenciadas por nuestras identidades, las limitaciones/posibilidades de nuestros contextos y experiencias. Nuestras viñetas exponen cómo la legislación nos sometió a un estado de vigilancia que a veces produjo miedo y vacilación, especialmente para aquellos en puestos relacionados con la docencia en formación. Sin embargo, la resistencia también estuvo presente en respuesta a la legislación en casi todas las viñetas. Las implicaciones que surgen de este estudio incluyen la importancia de que los educadores incorporen las voces de los estudiantes como una forma de respaldo y la necesidad de formar coaliciones para una enseñanza crítica. Los hallazgos sugieren que políticas como la HB 1084 socavan la enseñanza culturalmente relevante, antirracista y centrada en la justicia y son fundamentalmente regresivas para mejorar el sistema escolar público.
Palabras clave: legislación educativa; censura; reflexión sobre la práctica; resistencia; políticas neoliberales

Medo, hesitação e resistência: Respostas dos educadores da Geórgia à legislação de conceitos divisivos

Resumo: Os ataques atuais à teoria crítica da raça (CRT em inglês) e à legislação neoliberal trabalham para minar a educação pública e a democracia nos Estados Unidos. A legislação de conceitos divisivos restringe o que os professores dizem e fazem, agindo como uma contra-onda à implementação de iniciativas de diversidade, equidade e inclusão. Neste artigo, um coletivo de educadores com identidades diversas trabalhando em contextos variados se envolve em uma reflexão colaborativa sobre o impacto do HB 1084 (uma política de censura na Geórgia) em suas práticas educacionais. Geramos vinhetas e as codificamos para o grau em que reagimos com medo, hesitação e/ou resistência. Nossas respostas existiram dentro desse conjunto de reações e foram influenciadas por nossas identidades, restrições/possibilidades de nossos contextos e

experiências. Nossas vinhetas expõem como a legislação nos sujeitou a um estado de vigilância que às vezes produzia medo e hesitação, especialmente para aqueles em posições relacionadas ao ensino pré-serviço. No entanto, a resistência também estava presente em resposta à legislação em quase todas as vinhetas. Implicações emergentes deste estudo incluem a importância de educadores envolverem vozes de estudantes como uma forma de apoio e a necessidade de construção de coalizões para ensino crítico. Descobertas sugerem que políticas como HB 1084 minam o ensino culturalmente relevante, antirracista e centrado na justiça e são fundamentalmente regressivas para melhorar o sistema de escolas públicas.
Palavras-chave: legislação educacional; censura; reflexão sobre a prática; resistência; políticas neoliberais

Fear, Hesitation, and Resistance: Georgia Educators' Responses to Divisive Concepts Legislation

Attacks on critical race theory (CRT) have amplified in response to the racial reckoning that occurred in the United States following the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Part of this reckoning included an increased focus on bolstering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives across several sectors. The attacks that followed were—and still are—an intentional, coordinated effort by right-wing conservatives to protect the status quo and fiercely maintain current structural inequities that primarily benefit white, middle, and upper-class peoples (López & Sleeter, 2023; López et al., 2021). Part of these attacks included a wave of neoliberal legislation that is market-driven and diverts resources from public services (Apple, 2004; Lopéz, 2021). Neoliberalism is defined as a political ideology that ensures individual freedoms through market and trade with five major values, including: "the individual, freedom of choice, market security, laissez-faire, and minimal government" (Brown et al., 2022, p. 464). Michael Apple (2004) further defines neoliberal policies, with their market solutions, as a means to reproduce, rather than subvert, "traditional hierarchies of class and race" (p. 19). When applied to education, then, neoliberalism turns educational spaces into marketplaces rather than democratic spaces for cultivating inquiry and intellectual pursuits. Neoliberal policies are colorblind, market-driven, and often dehumanizing because these policies focus on student outcomes instead of students as holistic beings (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Currently, "divisive concepts" legislation, which falls under the larger umbrella of neoliberal legislation, works to undermine education and democracy in the United States. Divisive concepts legislation censors and limits what "schools can teach with regard to race, American history, politics, sexual orientation and gender identity" (Gross, 2022) and restricts teaching about systemic racism and other so-called "divisive concepts" (López et al., 2021). This legislation promotes color-evasive perspectives in K-12 curricula that de-emphasize criticality and present new barriers to justice-oriented teaching. According to López and colleagues (2021), such undermining prevents "analysis and discussion of the role that race and racism have played in our history" (p. 11). Further, some advocacy groups claim that these divisive concepts limit their right to free speech by limiting discussions related to race, gender, and other identities (Bissell, 2023). Divisive concepts legislation acts as a counterwave to the implementation of DEI programs and initiatives intended to increase awareness about inequities, specifically focusing on opposition to the principles of critical race theory (CRT).

Divisive concepts legislation perverts the definition of CRT and misapplies it. Regarding CRT, López & Sleeter (2023) explained, "In essence, Critical Race Theory attempts to account for and explain the continuation of racial inequality, despite laws that purport to put an end to racism"

(p. 5). CRT originated in legal scholarship (Crenshaw, 1991) and focused on "the role of 'voice' in bringing additional power to the legal discourses of racial justice" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13), considering how the exchange of stories between teller and listener could help to overcome ethnocentrism and dysconscious racism (King, 1992). Divisive concepts legislation resorts to the same scare tactics that originated during the Cold War, "equat[ing] racial justice with Communism" (Kreiss et al., 2024). One form of divisive concepts legislation, anti-CRT legislation, emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the aforementioned national reckoning with anti-Blackness in 2020. Following Christopher Rufo's redefining of CRT as all "discourse about race that the right finds questionable" (López & Sleeter, 2023, p. 7), the legislation was propelled by former President Trump's 2020 memo that "ordered a stop to funding federal training on diversity and Critical Race Theory" (Miller et al., 2023, p. 142), as well as Trump's Executive Order (EO) 13950, "Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping," issued September 22, 2020, which identified nine divisive concepts that federal workers and uniformed services should not address (Federal Register - National Archives, 2020).

Although EO 13950 was overturned on January 20, 2021, the day President Joseph Biden took office (Fix, 2021, p. 748), it inspired right-wing conservatives to take up this same language in writing neoliberal legislation, and by April 28, 2022, 42 states had introduced anti-CRT legislation (Miller et al., 2023, p. 142). Anti-CRT advocates relied on a flood of disinformation and gaslighting that insisted CRT was being taught in public elementary, middle, and high school settings, which helped to instigate "a *moral panic* that [could] constitute a disaster that then demand[ed] action" (Miller et al., 2023, p. 147, emphasis in the original). Such manufactured panic created a culture of paranoia surrounding how race and racism are taught in schools, with cash-rich organizations like Moms for Liberty (Swenson, 2023) further inspiring fear. Additionally, politicians (e.g. Ron DeSantis), think tanks (e.g. Heritage Foundation), funding organizations (e.g. DeVos Family Foundation), and white evangelical Christian organizations (e.g. Focus on the Family) sought to profit by vilifying and therefore further privatizing public education (Miller et al., 2023).

Signed into law on April 22, 2022, Georgia is one of 44 states that has introduced divisive concepts legislation since January 2021 (Schwartz, 2023). Entitled the "Protect Students First Act," Georgia's House Bill 1084 (HB 1084) labeled nine concepts as "divisive" and prohibited them in mandatory training, classroom instruction, and curriculum. Race and gender are featured extensively in the language of the legislation. As this legislation is relatively new, there is scant research examining its effects. Because teachers are the educational stakeholders who must interpret and then respond to this legislation, we focus on the impact of this legislation on teachers. This article is authored by a racially and gender-diverse collective of teacher-scholars in Georgia who reflect on the implications of HB 1084 on our work and consider ways we navigate pushback to critical teaching through writing. Through an autoethnographic approach (Bloom-Christen & Grunow, 2022; Grau & Walsh, 1998; Hughes & Pennington, 2017), we crystallized our vignettes—told reflectively and purposefully—in response to these guiding questions:

1. How is divisive concepts legislation impacting a diverse group of educators?
2. How do educators navigate divisive concepts legislation, specifically Georgia's "Protect Students First Act," in different contexts?

Divisive Concepts Legislation in Georgia

The "Protect Students First Act," also referenced as HB 1084 throughout this article, passed in 2022 and is an amendment to Title XX of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.). According to its first author, Representative Will Wade (R-9th), the goal of HB 1084 is to ensure students are centered in conversations about their education. It requires Local Boards of Education

to prohibit discrimination based on race and to form complaint resolution policies with a five-day review period upon receipt of a complaint. Such complaints can be made by parents, students at the age of majority, or employees. However, the legislation specifies that:

> Nothing in this Code section shall be construed or applied to…prohibit a school administrator, teacher, other school personnel, or an individual facilitating a training program from responding in a professionally and academically appropriate matter and without espousing personal political beliefs to questions regarding specific divisive concepts raised by students, school community members, or participants in a training program. (GA HB 1084, 2022)

Thus, divisive concepts are not explicitly positioned as taboo topics. Rather, the emphasis is on teachers avoiding the sharing of personal beliefs related to these topics. The nine identified divisive concepts in Georgia's legislation can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Divisive Concepts in Georgia's HB 1084

1. One race is inherently superior to another race.
2. The United States is fundamentally racist.
3. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, is inherently or consciously racist or oppressive toward individuals of other races.
4. An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race.
5. An individual's moral character is inherently determined by his or her race.
6. An individual, solely by virtue of his or her race, bears individual responsibility for actions committed in the past by other individuals of the same race.
7. An individual, solely by virtue of his or her race, should feel anguish, guilt or any other form of psychological distress.
8. Performance-based advancement or the recognition and appreciation of character traits, such as a hard work ethic, are racist or have been advocated for by individuals of a particular race to oppress individuals of another race.
9. Any other form of race scapegoating or race stereotyping. (GA HB 1084, 2022, pp. 2-3)

Because the language is vague—critics say unconstitutionally so—teachers are left unsupported in navigating its terms (Rhym & Butler, 2022). According to HB 1084, within three days of investigating the initial complaint, the principal or charter school designee must provide a "statement of remedial measures" to the complainant (GA HB 1084, 2022, p. 6). This differs from a previous version of the bill that included language of jail time for educators. It is important to note that the "Protect Students First Act" is one component of a barrage of education policies that ultimately seek to censor and severely limit intellectual freedom.

Conceptual Frameworks: Resistance and Backup to Support Critical Teaching

We center the concept of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Zembylas, 2021) and also consider how resistance can be strengthened by cultivating forms of backup for critical teaching (Pollock et al., 2022). Common across multiple definitions of resistance is that resistance requires action in opposition to power (Zembylas, 2021), although what constitutes opposition can vary widely. Regarding action, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) wrote, "resistance is not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but involves some active behavior, whether verbal, cognitive, or physical" (p. 538). Importantly, by this definition, an action could be the cognitive decision to *not* engage in a required activity. In addition to action, Hollander and Einwohner identified opposition as a second common element of resistance.

Some scholars have argued that resistance must also include intent, a point with which we agree. For example, LeBlanc (1999) stated that "the person engaging in resistant acts must do so consciously and be able to relate that consciousness and intent" (p. 18). Hollander and Einwohner (2004) disagreed, offering a typology of resistance that includes "unwitting resistance," where there is action in opposition to power but it is not intended. Another area of debate is whether or not resistance needs to be recognized as such by the target. We position the act of resistance as not requiring recognition. For example, Simon and Campano (2013) focused on teacher research as resistance through the production of counter-narratives and creating alternative schooling opportunities, neither of which may be recognized as resistance. A final area of debate is whether resistance needs to achieve the intended outcome. We argue that an individual or collective action opposing power does not need to achieve an intended outcome for it to be resistance, although measures of success should consider impact.

Some uses of resistance in the literature are negative, such as teacher resistance to technological innovations (Toto & Limone, 2021) or teacher resistance to talking about race (Aronson & Meyers, 2022). In our work, we use the term resistance positively, meaning that educators are seeking to address unfairness or inequities. Thus, for the purposes of our research, we define resistance as an action or actions intentionally taken by an individual or collective in opposition to power, without requiring recognition or actualized goals. In our research, we focus on a very specific form of teacher resistance: enacting critical pedagogy despite neoliberal policies that seek to limit critical teaching, similar to Neri and colleagues (2019) who point out that enacting culturally relevant education can be seen as a form of resistance to the status quo.

In addition to drawing on this conception of resistance, we also considered structural or ecological elements that may support teacher resistance. Thinking about teachers as nested within multiple activity systems (Strom & Viesca, 2021), their decisions to resist a policy or practice are mitigated by resources, other people (e.g., administrators, colleagues), and power dynamics. In particular, we found Pollock and colleagues' (2022) five forms of "backup" when facing pushback to equity-centered teaching useful for exploring support for resistance. Based on interviews with educators who engaged in #USvsHate, a project focused on students and teachers designing anti-hate messages, Pollock and colleagues (2022) offered five forms of backup that can be used separately or simultaneously: stealth backup, subspace backup, student-led backup, school leader backup, and system backup.

The first method is stealth backup. In contexts where pushback is severe, censorship is high, and a teacher has very little support, they can still engage in small, often hidden ways to integrate criticality into curricula. The second method is subspace backup, where an educator creates an after-school club or elective class for critical conversations when criticality in core curricula may not be possible. Student-led backup is the third method, in which teachers allow students to raise issues and lead discussions, resulting in teachers being less likely to be accused of indoctrination. Additionally, a

fourth method, school leader backup, can occur when a principal or other administrator either does not intervene in critical teaching or actively advances a school culture of criticality, sharing this stance with students, parents, and other teachers at the school, and subsequently dealing with complaints.

The final method, system backup, involves teachers connecting with unions, professional organizations, and other external groups that can protect them. This method also includes drawing on state standards, standards from professional organizations, strategic district plans, and/or First Amendment rights, and explaining how critical teaching aligns with these policies and rights. As we constructed and analyzed our vignettes, we considered the extent to which resistance was present, along with hesitation and fear. This informed our data analysis, which we will detail further in our methodology section. Additionally, we considered what forms of backup were available in different contexts.

Literature Review

We open our literature review by briefly exploring major educational policies at federal and state levels and their impact on teachers and students, particularly focusing on the harmful impacts of neoliberal, conservative policies. The second section presents empirical research examining how educators have navigated neoliberal, conservative educational policies, including methods they used to support critical teaching.

Historicizing Neoliberal Policies

When we reflect on the negative effects of current educational policies on teachers and students, we must consider the historical influence of neoliberal educational policy. The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* under Reagan's administration "created a faux national crisis" that paved the way for "the far right's education agenda" (Love, 2023, p. 55) of neoliberal policies. Neoliberal reform is considered "big business, just like prisons," with the major testing companies making "$2 billion a year in revenue while spending $20 million a year lobbying for more mandated student assessments" (Love, 2019, p. 10). These high-stakes testing requirements impacted education by placing a large emphasis on accountability and achievement (Brown et al., 2022, p. 465). An over-emphasis on test preparation created limited opportunities for critical thinking, extended research, and other collaborative or creative pursuits. Instead of creating learning environments that fostered joy, care, and critical consciousness, neoliberal testing policies created an atmosphere of fear and surveillance, for both students and teachers (Robinson & Simonton, 2019). Furthermore, these policies actually did nothing to address the *opportunity gap* regarding access to math and literacy skills, particularly for students of color and students with low socioeconomic status (Rooks, 2020). The framing of this gap as an *achievement gap* resulted from "a conservative response to the Civil Rights Movement" in the 1980s, turning attention away from systemic issues and instead "individualizing the problem" (Kumashiro, 2022, p. xvi), rather than acknowledging the societal forces such as white supremacy and classicism that created the gap.

We position HB 1084 as neoliberal because of its: 1) focus on the individual, 2) function to maintain hegemonic power structures, 3) color-evasive language, and 4) inclusion of financial consequences. In spite of right-wing rhetoric to the contrary, research has demonstrated that neoliberal policies have damaging effects on students and teachers. Specifically, divisive concepts legislation, falling under the umbrella of neoliberal policies, hinder teachers' ability to create safe educational spaces (Giroux, 2023). For example, although students of color make up the majority of students in K-12 public schools and are projected to "comprise 56% of the student population" by this year (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE] 2016b), legislation like HB 1084 in Georgia

works to create fear and hesitation toward implementing culturally relevant and responsive curriculum that represents student populations and addresses their needs (Gonzales et al., 2021; Love, 2019). Because divisive concepts legislation like HB 1084 are relatively new, there has been limited research published in this area. Our study addresses this gap.

Teachers and Teacher Educators Responding to Divisive Concepts Legislation

We highlight the complexity of how educators navigate neoliberal policies, specifically divisive concepts legislation. First, we emphasize how resisting neoliberal policy has emerged in myriad forms, with teachers of color (TOCs) often leading the charge. TOCs "historically organized on behalf of themselves and students and families in their communities" in hopes of moving away from harmful policies and advocating "for policies to make the joys of teaching triumph over the barriers and challenges in the profession" (Todd-Breland, 2022, p. 30). In particular, Black women educators served as pioneering pedagogues, centering culturally relevant pedagogy that celebrated the "inherent promise and worth of [their] African American" (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021, p. 125) students' identities and resisted the anti-Blackness of the Jim Crow South. TOCs have proven more willing to "center discussions of race equity, and diversity" in their classrooms than their white counterparts (Mensah, 2022, p. 183), playing a "critically important role in disrupting educational injustice" (Walls, 2022, p. 460). White educators could learn from such previous models in how to resist neoliberal legislation.

In a recent study, Bagley and colleagues (2023) shared their experiences with a divisive concepts bill in Iowa that passed in 2021. Across vignettes, the authors share both hesitancy and resistance in response to neoliberal legislation. In the first vignette, an author stated, "I feel my freedom to embrace multicultural education in my teaching practice has been tempered by House File 802" (p. 72). However, this same author continued to teach texts focused on social injustices, including Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, and noted how "students who identified as conservative found moments of identification and were thoughtful throughout our discussions" (p. 72). Similarly, another author discussed how they taught about poverty, but only discussed the topic of police brutality if students brought it up. By allowing students to lead conversations on controversial topics, the authors identified student backup (Pollock et al., 2022) as a primary strategy to avoid reprimand.

In another example of a teacher responding to divisive concepts legislation, Katie Rinderle, a fifth-grade teacher in Georgia's Cobb County school district, continued to integrate texts celebrating different expressions of identities, including diverse gender expressions (Sonnenberg, 2023) after HB 1084 became law. Rinderle taught *My Shadow is Purple* (2022), a picture book by Scott Stuart, which provides a "gentle introduction to non-binary gendered themes, including: self-discovery and resilience thread through this story of inclusion and diversity" (Australian Arts Review, 2022, para 5*)*. A parent complained to the superintendent and Rinderle was asked to resign or be fired. She refused to resign and was fired in August of 2023. As we write this article, Rinderle is fighting her termination by working with a local teachers' union and the Southern Poverty Law Center, drawing on system backup. Clearly, this story is one of resistance, yet we wonder to what extent her story will create responses of fear and hesitancy for other Georgia teachers.

Rinderle's decision to engage system backup connects her to a rich, historical legacy of educators and activists organizing. For example, Goldstein (2015) described how the National Education Association brought together teachers, administrators, and college professors to "aggressively advocate for higher teacher pay and for teachers' freedom on lesson planning and student discipline" to resist the loss of their autonomy (p. 69). Spade (2020) further highlighted multiple examples of historical and current mutual aid projects that provided system backup for marginalized peoples, such as the Black Panther Party's survival programs in the 1960s and 1970s;

the current Sylvia Rivera Law Project providing legal services to trans and gender-nonconforming people; and medical camps run by No More Deaths that provide medical assistance to migrants at the U.S. border with Mexico. Spade emphasized that mutual aid brings people together to develop shared understanding, build movements, and solve problems through collective actions.

Methodology

During the spring of 2023 at Georgia State University, we engaged in a doctoral seminar entitled "Policy in Teaching and Teacher Education." Topics included attacks on critical race theory and policy (López et al., 2021), mutual aid and solidarity (Spade, 2020), pushback to and backup for equity-centered teaching (Pollock et al., 2022), school-university partnerships (Burroughs et al., 2020; Katsarou et al., 2010), and international teaching and teacher education policy (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Goldstein, 2015; Rooks, 2020). In considering *Mutual Aid* (Spade, 2020), we concluded that we could work together as researchers to create a work that reflected our experiences. Along with being a professor or a doctoral student, our roles included being teachers of varied subjects, an academic coach, and university supervisors and coaches to pre-service teachers.

With our kaleidoscopic experiences, we decided to dedicate time to investigate our experiences related to class readings, as well as our experiences in the face of neoliberal legislation like HB 1084, and this, in turn, shaped this paper. We engaged in an autoethnographic reflection (Bloom-Christen & Grunow, 2022; Grau & Walsh, 1998; Hughes & Pennington, 2017) of our reactions to HB 1084, constructing vignettes that we subsequently analyzed while considering Pollock and colleagues' (2022) forms of backup. Again, our guiding research questions were: How is divisive concepts legislation impacting a diverse group of educators? How do educators navigate divisive concepts legislation, specifically Georgia's "Protect Students First Act," in different contexts?

Autoethnographic Reflection

As Hughes and Pennington (2017) argued, "Centering the story of the self and focusing exclusively on narrations and descriptions of personal experiences are the hallmark of autoethnographic studies" (p. 14). We specifically reflected on our own unique experiences handling divisive concepts in the classroom, following a layered account approach, which uses "vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection" (p. 20). We each did individual autoethnographic reflections on our school contexts and personal responses to the divisive concepts legislation, which we turned into vignette snapshots. With this layered approach to autoethnography, we engaged in writing vignettes to "tell a story that illustrates an interpretive theme" from our individual experiences (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 220). These themes highlight the complexities of the policy landscape in which a teacher operates, weaving between policies at the national, state, and district levels that affect teaching.

Drawing on a broad autoethnographic approach, we paired this with Bloom-Christen and Grunow's (2022) way of creating vignettes within ethnographic work. Bloom-Christen and Grunow (2022) highlight that good ethnographic vignettes do not function as an end to a conversation. Instead, they operate as "a signpost or an index finger," pointing out realities to illuminate the issue to the reader and to invite further discussion (p. 10). Bloom-Christen and Grunow discuss vignettes as an important part of ethnographic studies, for vignettes provide insight into fieldwork and invite readers to step into the experience of the participants, "wrapping facts into the blankets of prose" (p. 11). Notably, vignettes fold into the work as necessary insights into the current sociopolitical climate and invite reflection on the issue at hand. Following Bloom-Christen and Grunow's (2022)

guidance on ethnographic vignettes, in reflecting on our practice, we "[made] explicit what otherwise would remain in the tacit realms of the unspoken" (p. 14).

Data Production and Analysis

We wrote our vignettes during collective writing sessions that occurred during our course meeting time, and in the weeks following, we worked to refine our stories and find junctures where our stories intersected and differed. Initially, we focused on writing an autoethnographic reflection of our own experiences. We considered what it was like to teach, learn, and educate in the context of Georgia's divisive concepts legislation, specifically considering the prompts *What is being done to you*? and *What are you doing in response?* After initial in-class autoethnographic writing, we then shared our responses, seeking "to capture a glimpsed understanding" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022, p. 67) of our collective experiences as we listened to one another's narratives.

Next, Nadia and Matthew read each vignette and conducted initial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), looking for patterns in our experiences. Saldana (2021) identifies initial coding as particularly useful in ethnographic work, as it provides a "starting point" that then leads to "further exploration" (p. 149). Initial codes in our autoethnographic vignettes included fear, supportive contexts, relationships, unsupportive administrators, supportive administrators, and scripted curriculum. Analyzing these initial codes, Nadia and Matthew created a set of reactions to divisive concepts legislation: fear, questioning/hesitation, and resistance. Importantly, these reactions can be experienced singly or simultaneously, and they are not static, meaning that these reactions might fluctuate at different times depending on particular contexts and forms of backup.

Nadia and Matthew shared this set of reactions with the class, and we examined the extent to which we experienced each reaction to better understand our response to divisive concepts legislation. Each author considered the forms of backup they had available (or not available) that influenced their response. We then partnered up with another individual in the class to examine each other's vignette and engage in dialogue that provided constructive feedback about how well each vignette addressed our research questions and the set of reactions.

Although our course had now ended, a selection of six authors who were available to meet over the summer decided to conduct collaborative coding to look for "shared interpretation and understanding" (Weston et al., 2001, p. 382) of our vignettes. Collaborative coding "generates knowledge that is not limited to individual perceptions, but which recognizes the nuances and complexities that multiple researchers bring" (Zreik et al., 2022, p. 2) with their varying perspectives. This differs from inter-coder reliability, which relies more heavily on quantification and is not always as appropriate for the more interpretative nature of qualitative research (Cornish et al., 2013).

Collaboratively, we began by applying a deductive a priori coding (Saldana, 2021, p. 40) that looked for the set of reactions related to fear, hesitation, and resistance, color-coding *fear* as red, *hesitation* as blue, and *resistance* as green. We then engaged in a second round of a priori coding that utilized Pollock's (2022) forms of backup, and we connected our reactions to what forms of support we possessed, while also considering how our contexts and identities shaped our perceptions. Figure 2 provides an example of our collaborative coding and the resulting chart, which emerged as we discussed each author's vignette and considered how the writing fit into the set of reactions, where forms of backup emerged, and how identity and context affected the responses.

Figure 2

Collaborative Coding Example

Author	Fear	Hesitation	Resistance	Holistic observations (memo)	Forms of Backup	Context, Identity, and Interactions
[Author 9]	"My shock, however, was borne out of a revelation that I was fearful" "I was afraid of the repercussions of reading a book that happened to have gay characters."	Sense of hesitation when his mentor teacher chose the book *Stella Brings a Family* "Well, I felt empowered until my teacher mentioned that she would be reading a book called *Stella Brings a Family* with a protagonist that had two fathers." All seemed well as we planned until I lowered my voice and whispered, "Are you sure you can read this?"		[Author 9] started by feeling empowered but then paused and felt uncertainty with a book that showcased LGBTQ+ representation [Author 9] has a lot of empowerment in this story because of the backup he has. If [Author 9] didn't have the backup he had, his hesitation would have turned into fear. In fact, [Author 9] notes he felt fear, but this fear did not affect his teaching. *Note: [Author 9]'s vignette occurred BEFORE HB 1084. Fear was already operating because of neo-liberal policies in schools	School leader backup (mentor teacher) System backup (parents, community)	[Author 9]'s identity as a queer Black male affected his reactions "I did not recall an authority figure explaining to me that sanctions would be levied against me if I, or any teacher, read a book about family, love, and inclusion that happened to have two gay characters."

Data Selection

Initial drafts of this article included all ten authors' vignettes, but we selected six illustrative vignettes to increase readability of our findings while still showing a diversity of experience. For example, we decided to cut Caroline's vignette, which like Adrian's vignette, occurred before the passing of HB 1084. Further, we kept Adrian's vignette rather than Caroline's because it revealed an identity and perspective not represented as frequently within teacher education (Black and queer as opposed to white and heterosexual). In contrast, we chose to include both Saniha and Kate's vignettes, even though they were in the same educational context, both serving as university supervisors at Georgia State University. However, in Kate's vignette, preservice teacher resistance to HB 1084 was strengthened by system backup from the university, whereas Saniha's vignette reveals how a preservice teacher in the field experienced hesitation despite potential system backup from the university.

Author Identities and Positionalities

As qualitative researchers, we acknowledge that our social identities are as embedded in the research process as they are in the ways we move about the world and how we navigate the conditions of current education policy in our state. While labeling ourselves according to socially-constructed categories such as race, gender, and sexuality, we do not share these as essential qualities, but rather "markers or relational *positions*" (Maher & Tetreault, 1993). Table 1 includes the roles we hold in educational spaces and our other identities, illustrating the diversity among us.

Table 1

Author Identities

Author	**Role**	**Identities**
Adrian	Elementary School General Education, Special Education, and ESOL Teacher, Doctoral Student in Educational Policy Studies, Podcaster & Citizen Journalist, 3 years teaching elementary school	Black, cisgender male, queer, able-bodied
Caroline	High School English Language Arts Teacher, Doctoral Student in Teaching and Learning, Former University Supervisor and Coach, 5 years teaching high school	White, cisgender female, heterosexual, able-bodied
Kate	University Supervisor and Coach, former Elementary Classroom Teacher, Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood and Elementary Education, 15 years in education	White, cisgender female, heterosexual, able-bodied
Lisa	High School English Language Arts Teacher, Doctoral Student in Teaching and Learning, 17 years teaching high school	White, cisgender female, heterosexual, able-bodied
Matthew	High School History Teacher, Doctoral Student in Educational Policy Studies, 8 years teaching	White, cisgender male, queer, able-bodied
Marquis	High School History Teacher, Doctoral Student in Educational Policy Studies, 6 years teaching high school	Black, cisgender male, heterosexual, able-bodied
Nadia	Associate Professor of Adolescent Literacy, Co-director for the Center for Equity and Justice in Teacher Education, Former Middle School Teacher, 20 years in education	White, mixed-race, cisgender female, queer, able-bodied
Nathaniel	High School Interrelated Teacher (Social Studies), Doctoral Student in Educational Policy Studies, 2 years teaching high school	Black, cisgender male, queer, able-bodied, Christian
Saniha	University Supervisor and Coach, Doctoral Student in Teaching and Learning, Former Math and ELL Teacher, 6 years in education	Indian, cisgender female, heterosexual, able-bodied, Ismaili Muslim
Marissa	Academic Coach, Science Educator & Curriculum Specialist, Doctoral Student in Teaching and Learning, 12 years in education	Black, West-Indian (Jamaican-born), cisgender female, able-bodied, Christian

Findings

To demonstrate how fear existed prior to the passing of HB 1084 and has continued since, we open with an experience from student teaching, with Adrian relating a vignette from before HB 1084 emerged. We then ordered our vignettes by educational level, moving from the voices of K-12 classroom teachers, including one elementary and two high school teachers, to those involved in education at the university level, including a professor and two university supervisors. Our hope in including voices from such varied levels of teaching was to illustrate the impact of divisive concepts legislation across different levels and the pushback present in varied settings and contexts. We note each author's race, gender, sexuality, and other highlighted identities to help the reader connect social categories to each author's experience. Because all authors identified as able-bodied, we do not repeat this information.

Adrian's Vignette: Elementary Teacher, 3 years of teaching experience
Adrian identifies as a Black, queer, cisgender male, and his context was a Pre-K through 8 charter school in an urban setting. The student body was slightly over 600 students in size and predominately white (70%), with a majority of students coming from financially stable backgrounds. There was an active Parent Teacher Association. This vignette takes place before HB 1084 became law.

During my practicum, I spent time in a Pre-Kindergarten classroom. There, I read books, sang songs, played games, and worked toward taking on more responsibility as a teacher. One day, my mentor teachers and I prepared literacy plans. I felt empowered by my mentor teachers to lead and facilitate meaningful and engaging instructional experiences. Well, I felt empowered until my teacher mentioned that she would be reading *Stella Brings a Family* with a protagonist who had two fathers.

The story revolves around a girl who receives an invitation to an event that requests she bring her mom and dad, leading Stella to search high and low for a mom to bring. In an effort to avoid spoilers, she stumbles upon a solution that brought a smile to my face. As we planned, I lowered my voice and whispered, "Are you sure you can read this?" My mentor teachers responded pleasantly in regular speaking voices because we were in the classroom by ourselves. Although I made my apprehension clear, they assured me that we would be fine.

First, many of the students came from households with two parents of the same gender. Second, one of my mentor teachers noted that the community supported their efforts in exposing their students to the ways in which life can be diverse and inclusive. I still hesitated but followed their lead. In leading up to this read-aloud, I wondered if this decision would result in the rage of parents, administrators, and the broader community. I was genuinely concerned. When it was time to read the story, I sat amongst the students and a few families that had stopped by for the daily read-aloud. Pages turned while all listened carefully. The book ended. And, we moved on. A few families even asked to borrow the book, so they could reread it to their kids. I was shocked.

My shock did not originate from the realization that a teacher had finished a read-aloud. That, of course, happens all the time in Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. My shock was borne out of a revelation that I was fearful. I was afraid of the repercussions of reading a book that happened to have gay characters. Upon reflection, this struck me as odd. I did not recall an authority figure explaining to me that sanctions would be levied against me if I, or any teacher, read a book about family, love, and inclusion that happened to have two gay characters. The community supported efforts to include diverse perspectives within the curriculum, and that's what happened. It seemed very simple in 2016.

Today seems more complex. With the passing of HB 1084, I wonder if students and families will experience book readings like I experienced. I wonder if people will feel silenced or so unsure

that they engage in self-censorship. I wonder what effect the law will have on teaching and learning. I wonder what sanctions and punishments will be levied against teachers if they attempt to diversify the characters in their read-alouds.

Matthew's Vignette: High School Social Studies Teacher, 8 years of teaching experience
Matthew identifies as a white, queer, cisgender male, and his context was a large, diverse suburban district that serves over 90,000 students and has families who speak over 160 languages and represent over 150 nations. The school serves over 2,000 students, with Hispanic/Latinx/o/a students representing the largest group (a little over 40%). About 40% of the school was also eligible for free/reduced lunches.

I am a high school history teacher in a diverse, multicultural school outside of Atlanta. I teach AP U.S. history and co-taught U.S. history with a special education co-teacher. Last year, while teaching about the Atlanta Race Massacre, my co-teacher (with whom I many times disagreed but overall worked well) abruptly walked out of my classroom. He did not say anything to me. He just left. Later that day, the department chair for the Special Education department told me that the co-teacher had come to her and stated that I was teaching "something CRT-ish." I thought back to the lesson I had taught that day.

As a class, we listened to a 25-minute podcast put out by Georgia Public Broadcasting about the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre. On September 22nd, 1906, many of Atlanta's newspapers had special editions that reported four African American men had assaulted white women in a single day. Thousands of outraged white Atlantans took to the streets, and over the next two days, 25 African Americans were murdered, with extensive property damage in the Brownsville neighborhood (now Old Fourth Ward). This resulted in more than a thousand African American residents making an exodus from Atlanta.

After listening to the podcast together, I asked my students several questions about the tragic event: What was the role of the media in the massacre? How had the "Atlanta Way" (Black and white business leaders coming together, at that time, to discuss what had happened and what could be done to avoid another race massacre in the future) differed from responses to other racial acts of violence around the country? Was fear regarding Black progress responsible for the massacre? And why had not one student in all of my classes even heard of the Atlanta Race Massacre, despite living approximately 10 miles from downtown Atlanta?

Fortunately for me, the special education department chair, with whom I am friends, responded to the co-teacher's complaint by saying, "Well, I've taught history with Matthew, and I agree 100% with what he has to say about our nation's history." But the occurrence still unsettled me. I was not afraid of being fired (most of my administrators are, if not CRT advocates, at least moderately progressive), but it did start me thinking about how much that I taught could either be an aspect of CRT or at least construed as such. This experience also had me wondering how many teachers are surveilling other teachers. I do not think that my co-teacher was trying to have me fired. I think that he was worried about his own job, but, unfortunately, he chose to go above me instead of having a conversation about what I was attempting to teach to the class. I definitely now think much more about what I am teaching than I did before the divisive concepts legislation was passed in Georgia. That in and of itself is not a bad thing, but allowing fear to keep me from teaching concepts that I find to be integral to our nation's history would be, at the very least, troubling.

Lisa's Vignette: High School English Language Arts Teacher, with 17 years of teaching experience
Lisa identifies as a white, heterosexual, cisgender female, and her context involved teaching at a large suburban district in Georgia that has seen a continually growing and diversifying population over the past 20 years. After the summer 2020 racial reckonings, the district underwent shifts in school board and superintendent leadership, which incited backlash from a vocal minority of conservative parents. Lisa then moved to the same large, diverse suburban district as Matthew. All names are pseudonyms.

"Lisa, I don't know what to do. I just had my students buy copies of Octavia Butler's *Kindred* in anticipation of teaching it next week, and now some parent has complained to Mr. Jenkins about the book, so he's making us pull it from the curriculum," Marie, my friend and former colleague, lamented on the phone.

A few weeks earlier, Marie called to share a story about how her team was not allowed to teach a short story by Sherman Alexie after a parent complained to the principal about the "inappropriateness" of the text. The complaint was that the story showed a fight at recess that "glorified violence." I was furious about administration's fearful response to one parent's complaint about what was appropriate for student consumption, thus censoring authors of color while canonical white male authors' writings that included issues of violence and brutality, unfaithfulness and adultery, gender stereotyping, and more remained firmly rooted within the curriculum without complaint.

However, I was not surprised.

For 16 years, I had been at the same school where Marie now taught; it was a comfortable space, I was established, and I had "status." Over the years, I had successfully embedded a social-justice-focused curriculum, with texts like Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* (2014) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000), with very little pushback. My race (white) and years of teaching helped in this aspect. However, the combination of HB 1084's passing, the conservative (mostly white) parental anger toward new school board members and new courses being offered (e.g. Ethnic Studies), and the weakened administrative team that catered to reactionary parents made me nervous about what would be on the horizon the next year.

So I decided to leave.

My premonition that a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum might be curtailed helped push me to transfer to a new school in a different county. I chose to go to another large suburban district, but this one was considered a predominantly Black institution (PBI) in terms of its student population and considered more progressive in terms of permitted curriculum.

That afternoon, as I listened, horrified, to Marie, I felt I had made the right choice in leaving. In my first couple months at my new school, I had complete freedom in selecting texts for the World Literature course I taught, with little to no oversight from my laissez-faire administration. Because I am bold and unapologetic as an experienced teacher in introducing myriad literary voices, my sophomores' reading list included texts such as Indigenous author Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), Ghanaian-American author Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016), and graphic novel memoir literature circles from the Asian experience (with texts like George Takei's 2019 *They Called Us Enemy*, among others). Not surprisingly, students were interested in reading and engaging with these texts. One even asked, "Why haven't we been reading more books like this? I might have actually finished one before now."

Counter to HB 1084's narrative that exposing children to true history or stories different from those in their own homes may cause "psychological distress" (See 7th divisive concept in Georgia's HB 1084, noted in Figure 1), my students appreciated opportunities to gain perspective, understand positionality, and question power. To "protect" our children, perhaps we should give them opportunities to read the world (Freire, 2000) as they see it: multimodal, multicultural, multilingual. This global context is part of living in the twenty-first century.

I turned to page 141 in my copy of *Kindred* and read aloud to Marie, "Repressive societies always seemed to understand the danger of 'wrong' ideas." Closing my book, I asked, "'*Wrong ideas*?...," then paused, and said, "Sounds like *good trouble* to me."

Nadia's Vignette: Associate Professor at a university, 20 years of teaching experience

Nadia identifies as a white-presenting, mixed-race, queer, cisgender female, and her context was teaching an English language arts (ELA) methods class to 20 undergraduate preservice teachers preparing to be middle school teachers. Her preservice teachers (PSTs) were diverse regarding race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, age, and whether they grew up in urban, suburban, or rural contexts. Most PSTs were students of color, with Black students forming the largest subgroup, contrasting with the national norm in teacher preparation. Additionally, Nadia's university serves many first-generation college students.

I often teach an English language arts methods class to preservice teachers (PSTs), yet this time it's in the era of divisive concepts legislation. The legislature has requested syllabi from our college of education. One of our administrators asked me to review a website I maintain—to make sure it doesn't raise any red flags that could get us targeted under HB 1084. There's a sense of fear, even in this supposed space of academic freedom, and I feel it, even though I have tenure and have been teaching teachers for a decade in a social justice-centered program.

This semester, I am teaching a lesson about writing a gender narrative where my PSTs are asked to consider when gender norms have limited what they can do, how they can act, or who they can be. We've examined some definitions of sex, gender, and sexual orientation that resist a binary, read different mentor texts about people grappling with gender, and engaged in quick writes to surface PSTS' experiences and thinking.

We are about to write our narratives, when one PST says, "I am all for people being who they want to be, but I don't think trans women should participate in women's sports." I hesitate, which is an appropriate response when dealing with controversial topics in the classroom. Yet I feel in this hesitation a concern that wasn't there before. Am I being recorded? Will my response to this student be published on the internet and used as fodder on a radical right-wing website to position me as indoctrinating my students? I move through these thoughts and respond as thoughtfully as I can, seeking to surface this person's thinking behind the statement. Other students chime in with their perspectives, sharing their experiences, other resources, and counterarguments. The issue is not resolved, but I think we have surfaced different perspectives on the topic.

Yet…yet…what bothers me is that this legislation generated fear that entered into my response. And if I feel this way, how does a new teacher in a far more constrained context feel when they try to enact this gender narrative lesson? Am I inadvertently widening the university-school disconnect (Johnson & Barnes, 2018) by modeling a lesson that new teachers will struggle to teach? I ask these questions, and then immediately refute them. Because students deserve a chance to interrogate the gender binary, and LGBTQIA people, including myself, deserve to have their identities brought into focus and their experiences (both positive and negative) honored and heard. I start to ask different questions: what am I doing to shape educational policies? If I don't do something about the policies that constrain teachers (and myself), if I am not directly collaborating with classroom teachers, then am I being ethical?

Kate's Vignette: University Supervisor, 15 years of teaching experience

Kate identifies as a white, heterosexual, cisgender female, and her context is the same university where Saniha and Nadia work, and she worked as a university supervisor (rather than a professor) with PSTs who were mostly students of color and, specifically, Black. These PSTs were student teaching in a large urban school district whose mid-sized schools consisted of student bodies that were predominantly Black, from families whose incomes were mostly below the federal poverty level (around 80% of students qualified for free/reduced lunches).

I am a University Supervisor and Coach (USC) for a teacher residency associated with the university. USCs support the mission for every student to have a skilled, compassionate, anti-racist teacher by fulfilling the traditional duties of a university supervisor while providing additional equity-focused coaching to preservice teachers in the final year of their certification program. We act as

critical friends to each other, working through problems of practice during regular meetings. At a recent gathering of residency staff, we read HB 1084 and discussed it in small groups.

"This won't be challenged in our schools. This isn't for our kids," an instructional mentor said.

"Right, this ain't about protecting our kids. It never was, because Black kids have been psychologically harmed in schools forever," said another. As a staff, the residency has only recently been housed fully within the university. As a graduate student, I immediately wondered if this move was a mistake. I was concerned the university setting would now restrict anti-racism work due to potential HB 1084 complaints. Some colleagues even wondered if their jobs were secure.

"What will this mean for the grant?" someone asked.

"The grant was written with this language and awarded to us. That will not change," said someone who had worked on writing the grant. Later, at a gathering of first-year residents and their USCs, we repeated the small group reading protocol with HB1084. I asked my small group if they had heard of it already.

"Yeah, on Instagram," one said. Another resident scrolled to where the bill outlines how it shall *not* be used.

He stated, "It sounds like they just don't want us talking about anything. Like we can't talk about any of this stuff with this."

Other residents nodded, and so I pointed out, "I want to make sure you see that at the beginning of this list, it says the bill *cannot* be used to prohibit responding to students' questions about divisive concepts." We scrolled back up to the statement at the beginning of the section, and reread the list with that in mind.

"Oh, so you can't use it to prohibit these things," someone confirmed, referring to having conversations about the divisive concepts.

"Right," I assured them. Because I attended mandatory training provided by the university, I have a sense of the differences between the traditional role of the University Supervisor and the residency's way of prioritizing social justice in teacher education. If my role as a USC was part of the traditional program and not within the residency, I would not have had the structured support for talking through this bill with my residents in the form of the conversations co-directors facilitated with us as a staff prior to doing so with residents. I came to a point where I knew that giving up would only contribute to maintaining the status quo. So I kept going.

Saniha's Vignette: University Supervisor, 6 years of teaching experience
Saniha identifies as an Indian, Ismaili Muslim, heterosexual, cisgender female, and her context is the same university as Nadia's and Kate's.

Similar to Kate, I serve as a University Supervisor and Coach (USC) for preservice teachers who are part of a residency program. HB 1084 impacts my residents immensely because they will be required to abide by these types of divisive concepts legislation when teaching. As part of their learning on creating lesson plans, residents fill out a specific university-based lesson plan, which integrates Muhammad's (2020) historically responsive literacy (HRL) framework. In this framework, students are expected to consider and plan for four important aspects – identity, criticality, joy, and skills – in order to make their lessons community and student-centered, so that they are aiming to not only improve on the content that they teach to students but also on how they make their classrooms inclusive spaces that promote social justice and equity.

During my first year as a USC, just after HB 1084 became law, I coached a teacher resident who felt that she could not truly implement aspects of social justice and equity education within her mentor teacher's classroom. Her mentor teacher solely focused on skills to ensure that students remained on track to cover all of the standards prior to testing. Her school utilized a largely scripted

math-based curriculum, Amplify, and the mentor teacher discouraged the resident from making any changes to the lesson plans created by Amplify. The resident included pieces of Muhammad's HRL framework when she filled out the university lesson plan, but then she skipped elements related to identity and criticality when she taught her students in her mentor teacher's classroom because she was afraid that she would get in trouble. While the resident met the objectives of teaching the math skill, she missed the opportunity to incorporate critical elements of Muhammad's framework.

When I took this concern to the mentor teacher, she was responsive but hesitant. The mentor teacher felt that these additional elements to a lesson were great in theory but were not practical for the resident since schools generally pressure teachers to prepare students for standardized tests. After a meaningful discussion, the mentor teacher agreed to let the resident integrate critical aspects of the HRL framework but only for a limited time within each lesson.

As her USC, I tried to navigate the university and school spaces to support my resident as best as I could. Although my resident faced this dilemma, I knew that we would all have to come up with a solution that recognized the mentor teacher's concerns and suggestions even, although I personally believed the resident should be able to teach her planned lesson with no hesitation. This experience was difficult for me because I could sympathize with my resident on her fear of not being hired at that school next year if she ruined relations with her mentor teacher, but I could not empathize with her because my own job was not on the line and I knew that criticality was necessary for the students in this resident's classes. HB1084 may have caused hesitation for this new teacher learning to integrate culturally responsive pedagogy.

Discussion

The "chilling effect" of censorship legislation frequently causes educators to "err on the side of caution for fear that a student or parent might complain" (Meckler & Natanson, 2022). The legislation, in effect, may exacerbate a state of surveillance where those in education feel increasingly monitored (Skerritt, 2020). Foucault described this constant, watchful state as a panopticon, a "society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms" (Foucault, 2008, p.1 2). The fear of being watched and policed by parents or policymakers—even if such fear is perceived rather than real—can lead teachers to self-censor, avoiding conversations and curriculums that could be construed as divisive. According to a new study by the RAND Corporation, two-thirds of U.S. public school teachers are choosing on their own "to limit instruction about political and social issues in the classroom" (Woo et al., 2024, p. 2). Depending on the context of state and local policies in which a teacher is situated, the degree to which they "feel supported to engage in instruction about political and social topics" (p. 3) will vary. We would further suggest that the degree to which forms of backup exist for teachers will influence their likelihood of engaging sociopolitical issues in the classroom. Thus, a surveillance state likely interacts with positionalities, contexts, and forms of available backup to produce different levels of fear, hesitation, and resistance.

Through our data analysis, we noticed that fear proved most pervasive for those in positions related to preservice teaching. For example, Adrian's experience during his student teaching shows fear about the repercussions he could face for reading a children's book with diverse characters. His position as a student teacher increased his sense of vulnerability because he was not an established teacher at the school, and his identity as queer and Black further affected his reactions. However, Adrian's vignette occurred before HB 1084 became law, highlighting how neoliberal policies that preceded the divisive concepts legislation had already operated to generate fear and hesitation for teachers. Importantly, Adrian's fear and hesitation were mitigated by his mentor teacher, as well as a generally progressive school culture and supportive parents. This vignette demonstrates the power

of school leader backup to support teachers in enacting critical teaching in the face of neoliberal policies.

On the other hand, Saniha's vignette as a university supervisor reveals how not having school leader backup can limit critical teachings, with school leaders' desire to not disrupt the status quo being potentially exacerbated by HB 1084. Similar to Adrian, the preservice teacher mentored by Saniha felt fear. Although Georgia State University embraced Muhammad's (2020) culturally responsive framework for lesson planning, Saniha's preservice mentee "was afraid that she would get in trouble" and chose to leave out the aspects of the lesson when teaching that related to criticality. Finally, Nadia's vignette also addresses how the legislation creates fear for teacher educators working with preservice teachers. She acknowledges that this fear is likely heightened for "a new teacher in a far more constrained context." Yet depending on context, fear did not always equate with limiting criticality. In fact, in the three vignettes that identified fear as a response, only the preservice teacher in Saniha's vignette took out critical elements from her teaching. Examining her context, this PST did not have the school leader support that Adrian had during student teaching, nor did they have the years of experience and system backup from the university that Nadia had.

However, fear was not the dominant reaction to neoliberal legislation in our vignettes. Everyone expressed hesitation in response to neoliberal legislation (or in Adrian's vignette, to the pre-existing surveillance before this legislation). For example, in her position as a university supervisor, Kate was concerned that the university "would now restrict anti-racism work due to potential HB 1084 complaints," and she also worried whether her colleagues in the justice-centered teacher residency program had secure jobs. Although she had the university's system support, Kate felt heightened hesitation about the work of the teacher residency program because neoliberal legislation could make it a target.

Resistance was also present in all vignettes, except for Adrian's vignette, drawn from his experience during student teaching before the existence of HB 1084. Importantly, resistance is generally linked to ideological stances and forms of backup. For example, Lisa drew on her ideological stance and status as a veteran teacher to support her resistance, explaining, "I am bold and unapologetic as an experienced teacher in introducing myriad literary voices." In addition, Lisa noted how being white insulated her due to the privilege it afforded her, along with "laissez-faire" school leadership that supported her autonomy. Matthew also noted how his school leaders were, "if not CRT advocates, at least moderately progressive," creating school leader backup for critical teaching. As noted above, Kate voiced hesitation, yet she also voiced resistance at the same time, stating, "I came to a point where I knew that giving up would only contribute to maintaining the status quo." Kate never worried about discussing HB 1084 with her interns because of the system backup she had with the anti-racist residency program. Similarly, Saniha's use of a framework adopted by the university, Muhammad's (2020) historically responsive literacy, acted as a form of system backup to move preservice teachers closer to critical teaching, although in this specific case, the mentor teacher's push to limit criticality outweighed the university's push to include criticality. Despite fear and hesitation, Nadia demonstrated resistance with a gender narrative lesson. It is important to note that although Nadia had tenure and system backup in the form of a social justice-centered program and department, fear still crept in. Being a tenured professor does not create immunity to the fears the legislation induces.

As noted, we see how in addition to drawing on our positionalities and ideological stances, we all had forms of backup that supported our resistance. System backup was identified most frequently as a form of backup across the vignettes, and school leader backup was identified as the next most prevalent form of backup. Stealth and student-led backup were noted less frequently, with student-led backup particularly underutilized, and we return to this observation in the implications

section. Because of the reliance on school leader backup within our vignettes, we emphasize the importance of school leaders' ability to move past fear and hesitation toward resistance. Although curricular determinations have historically "focused on a body of knowledge stepped in Eurocentrism, anchoring Whiteness into the body politic of teaching and learning" (Marshall, 2022, p. 743), school leaders can support teachers in challenging "official school curriculum" and thus take a stand against "intellectual colonialism" (p. 744). However, if, instead, these leaders impose "high accountability structures" such as "testing, lesson plan, review, and classroom observations" that expect "lockstep adherence to mandated curriculum," this negatively impacts "the degree to which a teacher may be willing to challenge the system" (p. 747).

Examining the prevalence of resistance in our vignettes, we wondered to what extent our reactions to neoliberal legislation might be atypical for teachers in Georgia. Our study focuses on teachers and teacher educators who are engaged in research and members of professional organizations. Additionally, even if we did not explicitly name Georgia State University in our vignettes, we all have system backup through the university in our positions as doctoral students or professors. Georgia State University's emphasis on justice-centered and culturally responsive teaching practices helps to encourage this in our own classrooms. In addition to other systems noted in our vignettes, our positionalities as members of a university community provide another layer of system backup. Furthermore, we are members of professional organizations that offer system backup, such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the English Language Arts Teacher Educators (ELATE). As a final note, our engagement in this doctoral seminar and writing this paper acted as a form of subspace backup. We created an ad hoc collective that extended past the close of the course. We met together multiple times at each other's homes, engaged in co-writing sessions at coffee shops and online spaces, and our connection transcended classroom walls.

As we consider all of the backup we have available to us, we wonder if other justice-centered teachers and teacher educators have the same sources of backup that can move them from fear and hesitation to resistance when they are responding to neoliberal legislation. In our implications section, we bring in notions of mutual aid and coalition building to think about how teachers in Georgia--and across the nation-- can build forms of backup. Additionally, we share theoretical and research implications derived from our study.

Implications

As we coded our vignettes and examined our responses to HB 1084 legislation, we noticed how our experiences with the legislation were shaped not only by our education roles (e.g. novice teacher versus veteran teacher) but also by our identities. Particularly, race, gender, and sexuality play into our responses, as does our status in terms of the power afforded to us through our professional roles. For example, in Adrian's vignette, he described how the sociopolitical context in Georgia even prior to the Protect Students First Act did, in fact, instill a sense of fear or hesitation, especially because he was new to his career. However, because of the forms of backup he had available, this fear and hesitance did not result in censorship, with Adrian finding strength in the support of his mentor teacher. Adrian's vignette also highlights how fear and hesitation can manifest more strongly when there is a vulnerability associated with identity. When Adrian wondered if his students should read a book with gay characters, some of his hesitation resulted from his positionality as a queer Black man. In contrast, Caroline, whose vignette we did not include, also reflected on a past experience with pushback to justice-oriented education before HB 1084, and she exuded more confidence in her vignette because of her positionality as a white, heterosexual woman. Caroline's confidence in speaking to a student's parent, who was also the county sheriff, resulted, in part, from her position as a white female. Since 79% of school teachers are white (Will, 2020), Caroline also

benefited from representative system backup, being positioned in the majority. Thus, we begin to see how identities interact with forms of backup.

Additionally, we concluded that there was something else at play here that was related to identities, forms of backup, and roles, yet different. An example is when Lisa describes herself as "bold and unapologetic." We referred to this earlier as ideologies or ideological stances. It seems that having a strong ideological stance aligned with antiracist teaching, liberatory teaching, and/or critical pedagogy serves as an internal backup for resisting the degradation of justice-centered teaching due to fear. We thought about Acosta and colleagues' (2018) notion of "political clarity" where teachers "view their teaching as a way to help children resist and transcend oppression and learn to instantiate change" (p. 342). According to Acosta and colleagues, teachers must possess an awareness of racism and other social inequalities as well as how these create challenges for their students so that they can use this awareness to inform their instruction. Importantly, students should have the opportunity to resist harmful legislation that directly influence their educational experiences. This is why, after reviewing our coding, we encourage more educators to support student voices and student-led initiatives as forms of backup. We also encourage future researchers to consider using Acosta and colleagues' framework along with Pollock et al.'s framework to examine further the interactions among teacher positionalities and ideologies, contextual elements, forms of backup, and reactions to neoliberal legislation. Additionally, a complexity lens, like cultural-historical activity theory (Strom & Viesca, 2021) could help the field understand the multiplicity of factors at play in how teachers ultimately decide to instruct their students.

As a final note, a key practical implication emerging from our work is the necessity of coalition building and solidarity to build forms of support. One such form of solidarity is mutual aid (Spade, 2020). This is important for educators to remember as they resist oppressive legislation within institutional systems. We encourage forming coalitions locally, such as through collaboration between K-12 mentor teachers and university supervisors to develop "culturally responsive networks and partnerships" (Flores et al., 2022, p. 437) that help educators develop as advocates and leaders within their local contexts. Beyond the local or even state communities, educators can build coalitions through active membership in organizations such as Learning for Justice. Although each state enacts its own separate neoliberal legislation, the parallels and similarities among them calls for educators to rally together across state lines.

Conclusion

Educational policy is often presented in a positive light: No Child Left Behind (NCLB), for example, sounds like a plan to provide equitable access and opportunities for *all* students. President Bush first "introduced the law in 2001 with the beautiful promise of freeing poor, non-White children from 'the soft bigotry of low expectations'" (Goldstein, 2015, p. 185). In reality, however, NCLB eventually led to scripted "teacher-proof curricula" (p. 186) and the overtesting of students. President Obama's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) legislation, which followed NCLB, supposedly "represent[ed] a movement from more federal oversight to a state and local control" (Beachum, 2018, p. 1). By allowing more state level intervention, the legislation hoped to provide higher academic standards and greater educational innovation (p. 1). Instead, it resulted in curbed state interest when addressing low-performing and underachieving schools. Such legislation did not match in name and in practice. Likewise, "Protect Students First Act" (GA HB 1084) follows a similar suit. The legislation's marketing appears to certify the well-being of students. But one must ask: *which students….whose students*? *What do they need protection from? Whose interests does this legislation serve?*

Educational policies shape systems and structures, helping to determine standards and skills included in curricula. As Love (2023) said,

> Bills banning the teaching of America's racial history, Black people's resistance to oppression, and queer people's existence tell children who belongs in school and in this country… Curriculum is one of the most powerful tools in education to teach all children that people like them and people from whom they are different are beautiful, powerful and valuable, and so were their ancestors. (p. 128)

In other words, policies have the power to directly affect students' everyday learning and sense of self-efficacy. Legislation like HB 1084 undermine culturally relevant, antiracist, justice-centered teaching, and are fundamentally regressive to improving the public school system. Unfortunately, many of the students harmed by these types of legislation are students of color (Katsarou et al., 2010). Neoliberal legislation limits students' learning, undermine teachers' autonomy, and narrow the windows of American education. As such legislation comes into action, it is imperative that we interrogate it to avoid and assuage the growing, negative, and subvert racist messages taking root in our schools.

By speaking against neoliberal policies in our autoethnographic vignettes and sharing our experiences and responses to such censorship legislation, our collection of authors presents one form of action: writing that works as "cultural criticism, as tools for critique and political action" (Denzin, 2003, p. 138). We hope that others will take up this call to confront neoliberal legislation within their own localized contexts, resisting its influence by raising their voices. This could include a collaborative effort of other educators writing against neoliberal legislation about their own experiences resisting, as well as working with school boards or advocacy groups to resist censorship in their practice. These coalitions can support an equitable, more just future not only for students but also teachers.

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