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Black and Indigenous Freedom Dreaming as Critical Educational Policy Praxis

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Abstract: This article centers on freedom dreaming as a critical approach to educational policy studies. I examined how one Black and Indigenous American educator activist collective's conversations linked freedom dreaming to critical praxis. Educational policy studies would benefit from centering on Black and Indigenous knowledges especially if scholars aim to dismantle interlocking systems of oppression. I used a multiple-conversation and relational design to explore the concept of freedom dreaming within and between Black and Indigenous educator activist's commonalities, tensions, affirmations, and extensions. The findings of the study reveal three key praxis examples: protection, connection, and sustainment. *Protection* praxis represents an insularly space for individuals to express their experiences and resist oppression, leading to collective healing. *Connection* praxis highlights the acts of freedom dreaming in building linkages between and among policy actors, their ancestors, and younger generations. *Sustainment* praxis emphasizes how freedom dreaming energizes the work of educational justice movements, promoting coalition-building and intergenerational invitation. This study's knowledge co-creation implicates shifting the fulcrum towards Black and Indigenous conceptualizations of practicality and illuminating power maldistribution. To conclude, I offer a *freedom dreaming praxis manifesto* to render knowledge co-creation answerable to my comrades and similarly-situated collectives.
Keywords: critical praxis; educational policy; freedom dreaming; justice

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Soñar con la libertad desde las perspectivas negras e indígenas como praxis crítica de política educativa
Resumen: Este artículo se centra en el "soñar con la libertad" como un enfoque crítico en los estudios de política educativa. Analicé cómo las conversaciones de un colectivo de activistas educadores negros e indígenas de Estados Unidos vincularon el "soñar con la libertad" con la praxis crítica. Los estudios de políticas educativas se beneficiarían de centrarse en los conocimientos de los pueblos negros e indígenas, especialmente si los académicos tienen como objetivo desmantelar los sistemas de opresión entrelazados. Utilicé un diseño relacional y de múltiples conversaciones para explorar el concepto de "soñar con la libertad" dentro de las similitudes, tensiones, afirmaciones y extensiones entre educadores activistas negros e indígenas. Los resultados del estudio revelan tres ejemplos clave de praxis: protección, conexión y sostenimiento. La praxis de protección representa un espacio aislado para que los individuos expresen sus experiencias y resistan la opresión, lo que conduce a la sanación colectiva. La praxis de conexión resalta los actos de "soñar con la libertad" al construir vínculos entre los actores políticos, sus ancestros y las generaciones más jóvenes. La praxis de sostenimiento enfatiza cómo "soñar con la libertad" energiza el trabajo de los movimientos de justicia educativa, promoviendo la construcción de coaliciones e invitaciones intergeneracionales. La co-creación de conocimiento en este estudio implica desplazar el eje hacia conceptualizaciones negras e indígenas de la practicidad e iluminar la mala distribución del poder. Para concluir, ofrezco un manifiesto de praxis de "soñar con la libertad" para que la co-creación de conocimiento sea responsable ante mis camaradas y colectivos en situaciones similares.
Palabras-clave: praxis crítica; política educativa; soñar con la libertad; justicia

Sonhando de liberdade dos negros e indígenas como práxis crítica de política educacional
Resumo: Este artigo centra-se no "sonhando com a liberdade" como uma abordagem crítica nos estudos de políticas educacionais. Examinei como as conversas de um coletivo de ativistas educadores negros e indígenas dos Estados Unidos vincularam o "sonhando com a liberdade" à praxis crítica. Os estudos de políticas educacionais se beneficiariam ao centralizar os conhecimentos de negros e indígenas, especialmente se os acadêmicos buscam desmantelar sistemas interligados de opressão. Utilizei um desenho relacional e de múltiplas conversas para explorar o conceito de "sonhando com a liberdade" dentro e entre as similaridades, tensões, afirmações e extensões dos ativistas educadores negros e indígenas. Os resultados do estudo revelam três exemplos-chave de praxis: proteção, conexão e sustentação. A praxis de proteção representa um espaço isolado para que os indivíduos expressem suas experiências e resistam à opressão, levando à cura coletiva. A praxis de conexão destaca os atos de "sonhando com a liberdade" na construção de vínculos entre e entre os atores políticos, seus ancestrais e as gerações mais jovens. A praxis de sustentação enfatiza como o "sonhando com a liberdade" energiza o trabalho dos movimentos de justiça educacional, promovendo a construção de coalizões e a convocação intergeracional. A co-criação de conhecimento deste estudo implica deslocar o eixo em direção às conceituações de praticidade de negros e indígenas e iluminar a má distribuição do poder. Para concluir, ofereço um manifesto de praxis de "sonhando com a liberdade" para que a co-criação de conhecimento seja responsável perante meus camaradas e coletivos em situações semelhantes.
Palavras-chave: praxis crítica; política educacional; sonhando com a liberdade; justiça

Black and Indigenous Freedom Dreaming as Critical Educational Policy Praxis

> One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone.
>
> -bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)

> Unfortunately, too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they 'succeeded' in realizing their visions rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves. By such a measure, virtually every radical movement failed because the basic power relations they sought to change remain pretty much intact. And yet it is precisely these alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change.
>
> -Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (2002)

This article's purpose is to demonstrate *freedom dreaming* as a critical approach to educational policy studies. Freedom dreaming is an intergenerational and ancestral knowledge creation process that facilitates individual and collective acts of imagining beyond oppressive realities (Benjamin, 2024; Cajete, 2018; Grant et al., 2015; Green, 2023b; hooks, 1994; Kelley, 2002; Smith, 2004). Freedom dreaming is a complex act Black and Indigenous educators, learners, and policy actors have used in society at the convergence of their infinite social localities. I define educational policy actors as any person engaged in teaching and learning processes (Horsford et al., 2019). This means I center people who educational policy decisionmakers and researchers may construct as observers because of their individualized lack of power such as teachers, students, families, community organizers, and activists (Dumas, 2008; Shirley, 2009). My conceptualization of policy actors' freedom dreaming praxis resides in local Black and Indigenous brilliance despite power maldistribution, or the ways systems and their actor's horde influence over educational policy processes (Diem et al., 2014; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020; Stewart & Goddard, 2024). I situate this article as an extension of my ancestral knowledge and share how one Black and Indigenous educator activist collective engaged in educational policy praxis via freedom dreaming.

Powerful decisionmakers have mobilized anti-Black and settler colonial educational structures for Black and Indigenous subjugation, and erasure (Dumas & ross, 2016; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). Critical educational policy scholars have made connections across research situated to illuminate these oppressive realities and engaged in knowledge co-creation activities in the pursuit of equitable futures (Dumas, 2014; Hytten, & Stemhagen, 2023; Stewart, 2023; Tuck & Yang, 2014). However, the recent emergence of critical educational policy studies should not overshadow the long history of Black and Indigenous critiques of educational policy, practice, and research. African diasporans and Black Americans have resisted white-centric curriculum and processes from their inception (Givens, 2021; Stewart, 2022; Walker, 2005). Likewise, Indigenous American teaching and learning has always problematized western educational policies and politics (Lomawaima, 2000; Smith, 2019). Both Black and Indigenous intellectual thought paved the way for modern critical educational policy scholars (Diem et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2015; Smith, 2004). As a result, I situate this study as an extension of Black and Indigenous ancestral and modern pursuits of educational self-determination.

In this article, I explore how freedom dreaming may be critical praxis in educational policy studies by asking: How does a Black and Indigenous American educator activist collective's conversations link freedom dreaming to critical educational policy praxis? The study used conversational data from a Black and Indigenous educator activist collective, the Collective for short, to center freedom dreaming as critical educational policy praxis. The research design also included qualitative coding procedures and critical quantified pattern recognition in my analysis. The design allowed me to interpret conversational data as evidence of shared experiences within the collective's relational knowledge creation space. I identified three forms of critical educational policy praxis from my sense-making activities: protection, connection, and sustainment.

The educational policy studies field would benefit from linking Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming praxis to educational policy studies and relational research activities. This study's findings are important because they offer an example of how Black and Indigenous-led educational policy and politics may center freedom dreaming as sustaining and healing-centered praxis (Boutte et al., 2017; hooks, 1990, 1994; Kokka, 2023; Kokka & Cody, 2024; Wilson & Jackson, 2023). The mobilization of critical educational policy perspectives, centered on Black, and Indigenous knowledge, exposes the oppressive assumptions rooted in impracticality critiques of freedom dreaming. This study supports similarly-situated, critical educational policy actors and co-researchers as we collectively withstand and dismantle assaults from western, white logic and establish freedom dreaming as praxis.

Critical Educational Policy Framework

Critical policy analysis (CPA), or critical approaches to educational policy studies, have been forwarded out of scholarly dissatisfaction with traditional and positivistic approaches to educational policy analysis (Diem et al., 2019). More specifically, CPA scholars, who center critical examinations of racialization, Indigenous methodologies, and other marginalized communities' ways of knowing and being, have exposed the harms of dominant policy processes (Atwood & López, 2014; Dumas, 2016; Lugg & Murphy, 2014; Mansfield et al., 2014; Stewart et al., 2023; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016; Winton & Brewer, 2014). In stark contrast to traditional approaches to educational policy studies, critical approaches explore "how knowledge, power, and resources are distributed inequitably…and how individuals react" and resist oppression (Diem et al., 2014, pp. 1073-1074). In CPA, complexities are historically, culturally, socially, and politically situated. As critical educational policy scholars inquire about how policy phenomena contribute to and reproduce systems of oppression, they imagine alternatives to dominant policy constructs. Then, policy actors may co-strategize paths forward to capture the power needed to transform systems and institutions.

Scholars may use critical approaches to educational policy studies to co-create knowledge that holds the potential to be mobilized to redress educational inequity (Gutierrez & Lipman, 2016). Tuck and Gorlewski (2016) have forwarded a participatory policy analysis approach by co-organizing a collection of teacher educators. Their collective convened an alternative scoring consortium challenging racist ordering mechanisms of edTPA, a popular teacher assessment tool. Moreover, justice-oriented scholars have centered youth-led perspectives in efforts to abolish oppressive systems and prepare the next generation of movement actors (Aldana & Richards-Schuster, 2021; Bertrand, 2018; Welton & Harris, 2022). Wright (2020) and their youth co-researchers' knowledge co-creation led to six practical policy recommendations aimed at bolstering youth voice and training teachers to foster youth activism. Likewise, my educator co-authors and I have proposed the reality-imaginary spectrum (RIS) as a practical tool to help Black liberatory policy actors reconcile differences across educational justice strategies (Stewart et al., 2024a). Specifically, the authors encourage nuanced discussions among Black liberatory policy actors and how they situate themselves and negotiate action given power maldistributions. Ultimately, critical policy analysis has

included components where a wide range of policy actors negotiate strategies to mobilize their knowledge co-creation to a praxis of redressing educational inequities.

One key component of critical educational policy studies is scholars' intentional shift centering Black, Brown, and Indigenous policy knowledges (Horsford et al., 2019). The shift moves away from techno-rationality rooted in western, white, and positivistic paradigms (Shahjahan, 2011; Wescott, 2022). I argue the mechanism connecting freedom dreaming to critical educational policy approaches is examining educational determination through the lenses of people resisting oppressive, "social and institutional forces" and marginalization (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1073). My argument follows a series of premises:

> (a) Prior to any interaction with European settler colonialism, Black and/or Indigenous people collectively self-determined teaching and learning.
> (b) Once European colonizers constructed racialized hierarchies to hoard power and resources, Black and Indigenous people engaged in educational resistance, and the mobilization of teaching and learning to challenge western, white subjugation.
> (c) Black and Indigenous teaching, learning, and resistance transcends generations and racialized categories through freedom dreaming.
> (d) Black and Indigenous ancestors' freedom dreams ground their descendants' continued struggle for equitable futures.
> (e) Thus, freedom dreams cannot be evaluated by white, western constructions of practicality.

This study's Black and Indigenous collective returned to and extended ancestral self-determination within modern educational policy contexts. Thus, I demonstrate how Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming is a critical approach relate to the praxis of inviting the next generations of educational justice movement actors and continue ancestral legacies.

Black and Indigenous Freedom Dreaming as Critical Praxis

Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming, at the convergence of their solidarities, has galvanized communities around collective struggle, given purpose, and energized the next generations' acts to realize collective dreams (Cajete, 1994; Dalmage, 2021; Spaulding, 2021). It is vital for scholars and communities to explore Black and Indigenous solidarity within its nuance. There are infinitely complex freedom dreams within and between people racialized and politicized as Black and/or Indigenous American people (Stewart & Thompson, 2023). These complexities mean Black and Indigenous people may hold incongruent aims or different priorities (Similton, 2024; Suzack, 2021). The dynamic and relational negotiations that take place among and between Black and Indigenous American people are beyond the scope of this piece. However, I want to make an important note that this study's Black and Indigenous collectives' freedom dreaming implications should not be taken out of its specific temporal and relational context. Further, I situate the study in anti-colonial futures and transnational contexts as Black Americans' freedom dreaming can be positioned in our acts to reconnect with our nuanced Afro-indigeneity (Dei, 2018).

This relational and temporal context relates to my own situatedness, as the study convener, relative to freedom dreaming. When I was a boy, I can remember dreaming beyond what society constructed for me. My family was low-wealth and I was placed within an all-white education system. Like many Black boys, gatekeepers within the educational system often assumed I was unintelligent based on white, western logics (Andrews, 2015). However, I always dreamed of a place and space where adults would center and acknowledge my unique talents and gifts. I did not have the language, but the imaginative and ancestral feelings of freedom were present in me. It was my

college courses in African and African American Studies that enlightened me to this dormant, but always-present, feeling. This story emulates freedom dreaming's core principle residing in its unwavering presence within Black and Indigenous peoples' ancestral legacies. I shared these stories with the members of the Collective and we held a commonality rooted in the ancestral gift to dream beyond oppressive realities despite knowing what we imagine may not be implemented within our lifetime.

Educational policy researchers and practitioners can underrecognize freedom dreaming in the everyday lived experiences of educational policy actors. Above, I shared my own childhood journey toward freedom dreaming praxis. My freedom dreaming took place before I held any degree, could effectively articulate my thoughts in traditional writing, or thought of myself as an intellectual or policy actor. My story emulates the stories of many other Black and Indigenous youth, families, and educators who do not need western, white schooling outcomes to freedom dream of equitable educational policy structures. In fact, freedom dreaming sets dominant educational policy paradigms at the peripherals.

Scholars and communities' acts of setting western, white, and positivistic educational policy paradigms as periphery is one of freedom dreaming's central critical praxis mechanisms. Western, white, and positivist actors have established a global and "tyrannical" educational policy hegemony that devalues practitioner knowledges, solutions, and dreams (Wescott, 2022, pp. 10-11). These oppressive actors can immediately dismiss any policy solutions that do not go through "formal" processes, are not considered "objective," or do not seem "feasible" given the political realities of educational systems (see Perrotta & Pangrazio, 2023; Sahlgren, 2023; Trinidad, 2023). Oppressive policy actors can dismiss Black and Indigenous teachers, school leaders, and students' solutions or dreams when they bring challenges to the western, white, and positivistic hegemony (Lopez, 2020; McLoughlin, 2009; Rios & Longoria, 2021; Warren & Coles, 2020). I call the western, white, and positivistic efforts, to diminish Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming, *impracticality critiques*. My conceptualization of impracticality critiques can help communities connect to how critical praxis scholars have redefined what justice-oriented policy actors deem practical.

Critical praxis theorists have reimagined practicality definitions and challenged impracticality critiques by including educational policy actors' transgressions of dominant power maldistribution (Stanley, 2024; Stovall, 2024). For instance, McKiney de Royston et al. (2021) have described the protection praxis Black educators engage in to insulate their Black students from racialized harm at their schools. Protection praxis has emerged from unconventionalism, consciousness-raising activities, asset-based pedagogies, and creating insularly structures in schools (Adams, 2024; Louis & King, 2024). Further, scholars redefining practicality have argued it should be framed within the extent to which policy knowledge is relational, transformative, dialectic, and centers negotiations about a turn toward policy processes (Aldana & Richards-Schuster, 2021; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; McKay, 2010). Moreover, classroom-level policy actors have positioned their investment in the next generations as critical policy praxis because of the hope in building an insurmountable movement for justice (Green, 2023a, Kelley, 2002; Stewart; 2023; Stovall & Mosely, 2023). Each of these critical policy praxis examples set western, white educational constructions as periphery because they redefine practicality. Therefore, situating freedom dreaming as critical policy praxis dismantles arguments framing co-imagination as delusion. In fact, Ruha Benjamin (2024), in her book *Imagination: A Manifesto*, argued for an unapologetic defense of dreaming while oppressive policy actors continue to try and stifle imagination (Hartman, 2021). This study builds on collective imagination and demonstrates how freedom dreaming is an intentional, essential, and strategic decision seminal to educational policy praxis.

My literature review activities have centered on Black and Indigenous Americans' ancestral knowledge and freedom dreaming as critical educational policy praxis. I have illuminated a need to

identify the mechanisms linking Black and Indigenous educational policy knowledge to freedom dreaming and critical praxis. Thus, I asked the following question as this study's central inquiry, *How does a Black and Indigenous American educator activist collective's conversations link freedom dreaming to critical educational policy praxis?* The study design mobilized critical educational policy perspectives, centered on Black, and Indigenous people's knowledges, to bolster the activities of similarly-situated critical educational policy actors as we collectively withstand and dismantle assaults from western, white, and positivist impracticality critiques.

Methodology and Methods

I seek to recenter Black and Indigenous freedom dreams via critical educational policy praxis and relationality, or methodologies centered on co-researchers' connections to each other across their dynamic lived experiences. In all methodological considerations the Collective centered relationships as we identified commonalities, contradictions, affirmations, and extensions capable of leading to our collective freedom dream pursuit. San Pedro and Kinloch (2017) have framed these relational processes as projects in humanization (PiH). PiH holds a critical epistemic centering of how conversations are important and seminal knowledge co-creation processes moving beyond western, white research logics (Patel, 2015; San Pedro, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2014). The relationships the members of the Collective and I built through conversation, storytelling, and the words spoken to each other are important foundations to the knowledge we created together (Kovach, 2009; 2010; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Informed by storytelling methodologies, I interpreted conversationally-based examples related to how collective members were reconciling critical educational policy praxis and freedom dreaming. This knowledge-creation process is connected to Lawless and Chen's (2019) use of critical qualitative methodologies to illuminate educational policy power considerations and examine how knowledge contributors negotiate them. The Collective's negotiations, perceived tensions, consolations, storied educational policy realities, and co-imaginaries were the entry points into my analytical approach. I centered a relational methodology and used a collective conversational approach to evidence Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming as critical educational policy praxis.

It is important to share my own situatedness within the project because relational methodologies demand it. I experienced cognitive dissonance related to my position as a low-resourced, university-based graduate student my western institution subjected to structural constraints in securing a degree. One of the biggest constraints was related to the requirement to write a single-authored dissertation. My degree-conferring institution may not have recognized a truly participatory and co-authored project as legitimate. However, I did my best to balance these realities, stay true to myself, and honor my comrades' contributions. In addition to the formal degree requirements, we have also held a formal post-study presentation or answerability defense, co-presented at two conferences, and co-authored two articles beyond this initial study.

My justification for centering on relationality links to Richardson's (2019) work when she partnered with Black mothers and their children to co-construct narratives disrupting white capitalist heteropatriarchal structures. In narrative co-construction, Richardson engaged directly in critical storying. She stated, "I undertook this endeavor to contribute to my own healing and growth as a Black woman with a legacy of Black girlhood" (p. 25). In Richardson's study, Black mother and daughter researchers mobilized their relationality and turned their efforts toward the deconstruction of patriarchal reproductive politics. I am struck by their relational scholarship because I resonate with acts to center vulnerability and move beyond an objective researcher position. The reason I wanted to convene an educator activist collective was to explore my dreams of just futures I had when I was a middle school teacher. Our Black and Indigenous educator activist collective, built

through an invitation from my classroom freedom dreaming praxis, turned into a space that allowed us to co-imagine beyond anti-Black and settler colonial educational policy structures.

The Collective Design

Five Black educator activists and one Indigenous educator activist comprised our collective. Malcolm, Rosa, Love, Serena, Akiea, and I considered each other comrades in knowledge co-creation. We referred to each other as comrades in connection to Huey Newton's stances on solidarity (Middlebrook, 2019) and to signal how we were all knowledge contributors in the study. Figure 1 shows an artistic rendition of our virtual and relational space so readers can visualize where knowledge co-creation took place.

Figure 1

The Collective's Avatars

Note. Avatars were created by Cayla Jones using DJARN character editor.

Table 1 provides readers with how each comrade entered the study via their educational role, school contexts, and conceptualizations of their purpose. Each comrade identified as Black and/or Indigenous, an educator activist in their own conceptualization, and held shared bents toward educational justice. Our shared perspectives on educational justice may have influenced the depths of negotiations across our lived experiences. Similarly-situated collectives may find commonalities and divergences across our different contexts, educational roles, and positionalities as they make sense of our conversations given their own situatedness.

Table 1

Comrades

Name	Position	School Type	Defining Our Collective Work	Intersectional and Racial Identities
Malcolm	SEL Instructional Coach	Urban Public School	I am a licensed school counselor working as a teacher on special assignment to coach teachers on social emotional learning, trauma, equity and restorative justice practices. I help teachers incorporate topics of race in the classroom and also invite them to discover more about what matters to their students from a cultural lens. I also bring attention to social issues to other educators in the district.	Black Man
Akiea	K-12 Classroom Teacher	Urban Charter School	This phrase encompasses both aspects of what I do as an educator. My role involves more than just delivering content to 3rd grade students. I am committed I actively working to dismantle systems that oppress my students, my own two children, and our families.	Black Woman
Love	Instructional/ Curriculum Coach; Former Dean of Students	Urban Public School	This means that I work to raise questions, dialogues, and changes about inequities in hiring practices of teachers and staff, pedagogy, curriculum content, school culture, extended contract opportunities, racism and bias in the school workplace, racism and bias in the teacher to student relationships etc.	Black Woman
Rosa	Administrative Assistant; Aspiring School Leader	Suburban Public School	Being socially competent and active in gaining knowledge of current injustices surrounding education to be capable of teaching others	Black Woman
Serena	K-12 Classroom Teacher	Urban Charter School	To me, a teacher activist is someone who uses their work inside the classroom to spark the minds and hearts of children to seek change. I use the resources I have such as lessons, stories, and discussions to build empathy in kids, so they can change the oppression they see in the world.	Native Woman

Name	Position	School Type	Defining Our Collective Work	Intersectional and Racial Identities
Nate	Former K-12 Classroom Teacher	Urban Charter School	As an educator, scholar-activist, and educational policy researcher, I am interested in understanding how Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, who are K-12 teacher activists, engage in dual political activity for justice.	Black Man

I assembled the Collective through a U.S.-wide invitation to Black, Brown, and Indigenous educator activists. To me, the term "educator activist" signaled a certain level of agency related to dismantling interlocking systems of oppression within and beyond educational policy. Appendix A demonstrates one of the invitation tools I used to build the Collective. A reader should notice language such as "co-create a justice-oriented research collective" as a signal to the types of educators that may have responded to the invitation. Moreover, I sent the invitations via social media, tapped already-established relationships with local educators, and connected with Black, Brown, and/or Indigenous, teacher-involved organizations such as the Abolitionist Educators Network, Black Teacher Collective, and social justice teacher union caucuses. The final Collective included licensed, formerly licensed, and non-licensed K-12 educators who responded to the call, and I decided to include them all based on my anti-colonial stance on educator definitions in activist/movement spaces (Shield et al., 2020). Five out of the nine educators who responded to the invitation scheduled 1:1 interviews and engaged in group conversations until the conclusion of the study.

The negotiated educator activist collective engaged in a multiple-conversation design to collectively create space for freedom dreaming (Caxaj & Berman, 2014). The larger project consisted of five 1:1 conversations, four collective conversations, one answerability defense conversation (60 minutes), and two group member-checking conversations (60 minutes) totaling 12 conversational transcripts. First, Malcolm, Rosa, Love, Serena, and Akiea accepted an invitation and joined me in a 1:1 conversation. We exchanged stories about our journeys as educators and dreamed of Black and Indigenous policy futures. The 1:1 design component allotted me time to know each comrade on a deeper level before starting with group dialogue. Then, we would enter future group spaces with emerging relationships. It is important to note several comrades had connections beyond the study, although most of us had not known each other prior to group sessions. The first group session started February 2021 and ended May 2021—they were scheduled to last around one hour but tended to go over time.

We co-created our group to be a space where comrades could affirm each other, challenge racialized gaslighting, resolve tension, and converse beyond the purview of western, white policy structures. I modeled our group conversations based on the "dialogic spiral," and talking circles because my comrades and my stories could be set in relation to each other through live discussion, negotiation, interrogation, and clarification (Barkaskas & Gladwin, 2021; San Pedro, 2019; San Pedro & Kinloch 2017). Appendix B provides readers with an idea about the topics and negotiations that took place during our virtual dialogic circles. When current events came up that were steeped in violence toward Black and Indigenous peoples, we navigated them together. For instance, during our third session, I suggested the Collective shift our conversation to navigate pain stemming from an anti-Black violence incident that took place in our local community and we negotiated. Likewise, our conversations happened during the school year following the 2020 uprisings catalyzed by the

murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. This context gives readers more information about the socio-political climate during our conversations about just educational policy futures.

I situated our knowledge creation activities answerable to what the Collective members needed; not what questions needed to be answered for the study. This design decision engendered excitement among comrades and we all looked forward to our monthly sessions. I asked comrades if I could record and transcribe conversation in preparation for data analysis and they agreed. Virtual conferencing software (Zoom) initially produced transcriptions that I cross-checked to capture tone, and emotion, as well as to seek my comrades' clarifications. I input more than 12 conversational hours, collected from both study phases, into an NVivo software project. I obtained institutional ethics office approval from The Ohio State University as part of my study.

Critical Quantification and Conversational Methods

I used aspects of critical quantified pattern recognition methods to analyze conversational data. This form of quantified pattern recognition merges critical epistemologies with numerical approaches to research methods and distinguishes knowledge gathering tools from the methodologies informing them (Brayboy et al., 2012; Garcia & Mayorga, 2018; Stewart et al., 2023). Scholars using critical quantified pattern recognition acknowledge how numeric tools can hide harmful positivistic logics (Irizarry, 2015; Museus, 2023; Strunk, 2023). As a solution, quantitative scholars can render their methods choices answerable to knowing rooted in ancestral gifts and collective aims (Thomas, 2005). I selected quantified pattern recognition, specifically cluster analysis, because my ancestors have made essential contributions to the mathematical theories informing the similarity indices I used for the analysis (Frankenstein & Powell, 2002; Izmirli, 2011). My goal was to weave numerical and textual modalities to honor my brilliant African ancestors. My ancestors passed the gift of quantified pattern analysis to me; thus, explaining data with numbers helped me tell one interpretation of the Collective's story.

Initial and Final Coding Processes

I engaged in an initial line-by-line coding process that was iterative, flexible, and ongoing throughout the Collective's individual and group conversations. I started with an initial coding structure based on teacher activists pedagogical and political activities and convergences (see Stewart, 2023). However, I remained flexible in coding conversational data that did not link onto already-established code categories. *New Structures, Systems, & Policies*, or NSSP, is an example of one of the coding categories I added to the initial coding structure and is the central data entry point to this analysis. I added this coding category because the Collective's conversations were inundated with dreams of new educational policy futures, and these imaginaries were a central link to the larger study's research question. Likewise, I included the emergent coding categories *Study Negotiations* (60 references) and *Relationship Building* (195 references) in this study's analyses. I added these coding categories because I observed patterns in how relational design decisions may have been influencing the knowledge co-creation space. The inclusion of these 255 references helped me contextualize how our collective may have challenged positivistic research paradigms within our relational space. I modified coding categories based on the Collective's conversations. For instance, I changed the coding category labelled *Enlisting the Next Generation* to *Inviting the Next Generation*. This change more accurately acknowledged nuances behind our collective efforts to build educational justice movements in comrades' current/previous classrooms.

Since there were multiple evolutions and additions throughout the data analysis process, I engaged in a final coding process to ensure I had opportunity to assign all coding categories in every NVivo file. The final coding process took place after the initial line-by-line coding process concluded. My final coding process added complexity, nuance, and accuracy to the data analysis and

prompted robust interpretation of the collective's knowledge creation. Simultaneously, I wrote memos during the final coding process to initiate sense-making from my examination of emergent conversational interpretations. Although I was the only person who coded conversational data and it was my interpretations of the NVivo output informing the conversational analysis, I weaved my interpretations into ongoing session dialogue and post-study conversations. My intent was and is to keep my interpretations answerable to the voices and perspectives of Malcolm, Akiea, Serena, Love, and Rosa while acknowledging my comrades' interpretations are valuable and seminal.

Cluster Analysis

I used NVivo's cluster analysis (CA), a quantified pattern recognition approach, as it is a method that can provide quantified, similarity outputs of coding processes. A CA approach allows researchers to interpret similarity indices based on textual coding processes. Here, my interpreted conversational data were the entry points evidencing the critical praxis example arguments. Qualitative, line-by-line coding methods work well with CA because researchers can illuminate quantified similarity patterns within conversational processes (Veziroglu-Celik & Acar, 2018). I want to be clear that my quantified pattern recognition approach was not needed to demonstrate validity. Rather, I wanted to utilize the ways my African ancestors continue to help me tell stories (Stewart, 2022; Stewart et al., 2024; Thomas, 2005). Furthermore, Lal and colleagues (2012) have explained one of major differences between various methods is how the interpreter treats stories in analysis. Numerical approaches may fragment stories in search of identifying the strength of similarity or commonalities across conversations, and narrative approaches may attempt to keep conversational stories intact. My study does fragment our conversations and stories via line-by-line coding; however, the purpose is to forward understandings of storying exchanges and strength of our connections in hopes of identifying mechanisms that link freedom dreaming to critical educational policy praxis.

This article's findings stem from one cluster I called *Envisioning & Building New Futures*. Figure 2 shows a dendrogram that NVivo's cluster analysis function provides to visualize the relationships between the coding categories included in the larger study. The branches, or coding categories, that are closer together signal a stronger relationship to each other. The *Envisioning & Building New Futures* cluster, or Cluster [3], held 420 of the total 4500-plus references, across 12 files and five coding categories. I want to emphasize that the 12 "NVivo files" I refer to are the five 1:1 conversations, four collective conversations, one answerability defense conversation, and two group member-checking transcripts. A reader may look to Appendix C to examine the names, description, and reference number breakdown. I argue that this cluster captured the Collective's acts to envision beyond interlocking systems of oppression and build new futures. I found this cluster to be ripe with knowledge co-creation capable of identifying the mechanisms linking Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming to critical educational policy praxis.

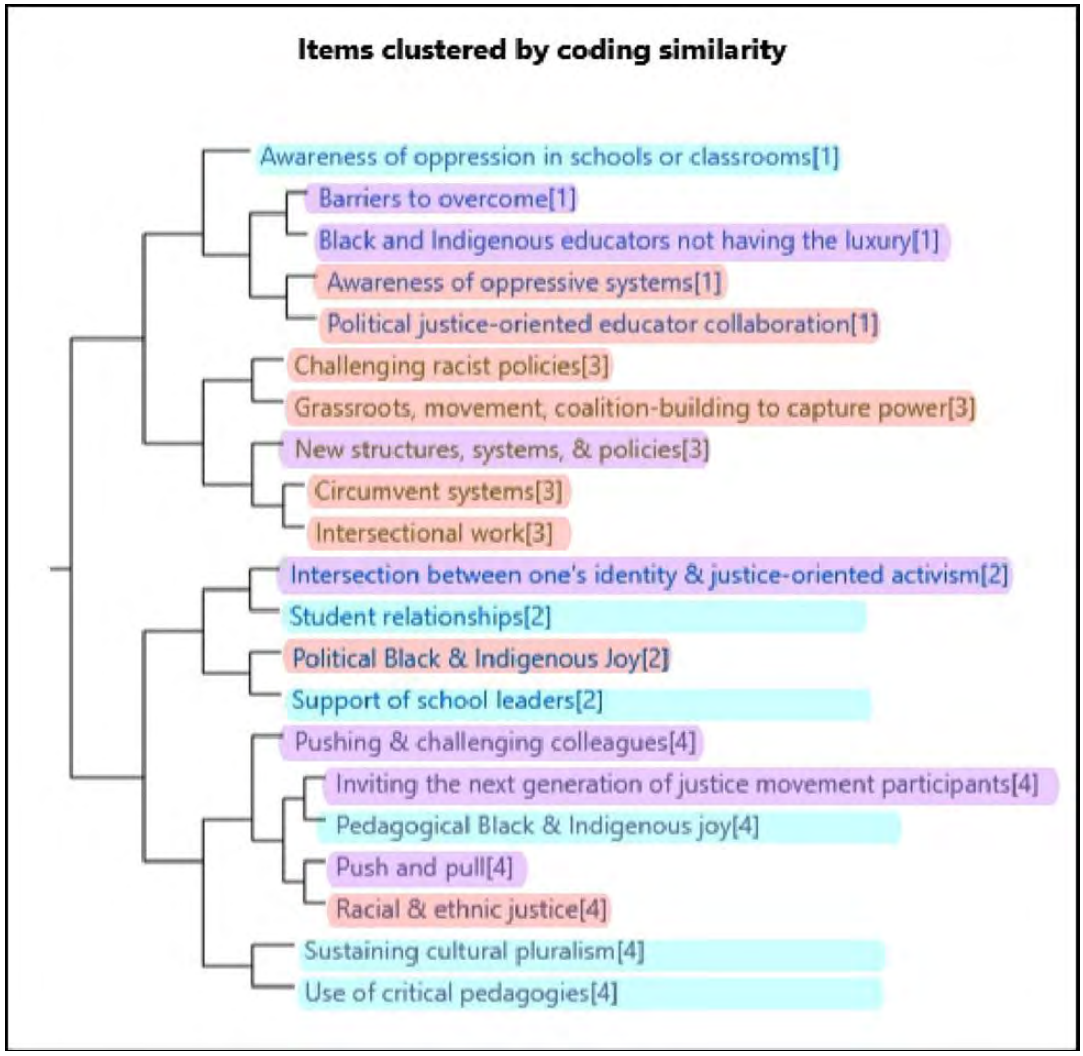
The algorithm informing the dendrogram computes a similarity index, or score, ranging from 0.00 to 1.00 with 1.00 being the strongest measured relationship between two coding categories. The similarity index quantifies the number of times I referenced coding categories within the same files relative to the total possible number of files. A score of 1.00 means I coded the category in all the same files 100% of the time, indicating a strong relationship. The algorithm informing the dendrogram then organizes the branches to be located closer to the coding categories that strongly relate or score closer to 1.00.

The dendrogram shows all the coding categories in the project, but I evidenced the act of freedom dreaming by the coding category *New Structures, Systems, and Policies,* or NSSP, within Cluster [3]. I used the NSSP category to code conversational data when knowledge contributors dialogued about and envisioned equitable futures beyond current oppressive societal realities. Thus, NSSP

coding references held important educational policy freedom dreaming perspectives that I interpreted across conversational evidence and praxis examples. The NSSP category held 93 references that built the central database for providing textual evidence from the Collective's conversations. I also included NSSP's relationship to the categories: *Challenging Racist Policies* (124 reference), *Grassroots, Movement, Coalition-building to Capture Power* (57 references), *Circumventing Systems* (100 reference), and *Intersectional Work* (46 references) since these were clustered with NSSP and capable of informing linking-mechanism arguments.

Figure 2

Cluster Analysis Dendrogram



Another measure, coverage, provides percentages indicating how much of the conversation was coded to NSSP which I interpret as the proxy for the Collective's freedom dreaming activities. The coverage measure indicated how much conversation time was spent on freedom dreaming across the four group sessions transcripts. Session coverage yielded 8.55% for session one, 5.95% for session two, 2.38% for session three, and 22.08% for session four. The higher coverage in session four was expected given the purpose was to co-imagine equitable educational policy structures.

Findings

Several study findings and arguments center freedom dreaming as a critical approach to educational policy studies in response to the central research question, *How does a Black and Indigenous American educator activist collective's conversations link freedom dreaming to critical educational policy praxis?* I argue the Collective linked freedom dreaming to critical educational policy praxis evidenced by the critical praxis examples: protection, connection, and sustainment. I discuss each of these forms of critical praxis below.

Protection

As the Collective engaged in conversation, there was evidence of freedom dreaming praxis in how we protected ourselves from state-sanctioned educational policy violence via negotiating relational research spaces. Protection should be understood as the centering of Black and Indigenous perspectives so that these politics are beyond the purview of anti-Blackness and settler coloniality. Protection praxis was evident in how the Collective was co-created via relational methodologies because comrades negotiated reciprocity from the start and continued throughout the collective sessions (see Appendix B for specific negotiations). In our first collective session, I, as the study convener, energetically shared my specific hopes for our educator activist collective space and invited my comrades to share theirs.

> I want to start with a collective brainstorm about what we want to do when our collective time together has concluded. Part of this project is to make sure that we are centering reciprocity. Yes, this is my dissertation work, but I also want it to be, I want the knowledge that we co-create, to be meaningful and valuable for your practice. Whether that's in your schools or your classroom or, state and local educational policy spaces. And so, I propose we do a quick brainstorm and see what you all think.

My intention was to center reciprocity, knowledge co-creation, and relationships despite western scholars' pressure to disconnect once the research project ends. I do not think I knew the extent to which comrades' relationships would extend beyond the parameters of the study, but I knew I wanted my comrades to feel my commitment to them and their reasons for accepting the study invitation. Beyond this initial excerpt, I coded 60 references to *Study Negotiations* and 195 references to *Relationship Building* across the 12 conversational transcripts. The excerpt above was one where I assigned the text to coding categories: *Study Negotiations*, *Relationship Building*, and *NSSP*. Here, comrades' emergent relational bonds to each other may have laid the foundation to circumvent western, educational research systems where our connections would transcend study boundaries. Reciprocity and relationality may be foundational to Black and Indigenous dreamers transgressing oppressive systems via protection praxis.

Quantified pattern analysis showed the NSSP coding category yielded a strong relationship with the *Challenging Racist Policies* category with a coefficient of .90. In other words, 90% of the time I coded NSSP to a file, I also coded the Collective's conversation to instances when comrades storied about resisting racist educational policies. This suggests a crucial praxis component to protection may be associated with circumventing white supremacist, and anti-Black educational policies and the sense in being protected in critiquing these oppressive systems. Moreover, I coded NSSP in the same files as circumvent systems at a rate of 80%. This 80% rate provides evidence that protection as praxis may broaden transgressions to consider many interlocking systems of oppression when freedom dreaming.

The Collective's conversations highlighted the connection between insularly spaces that provide protection in critiquing oppressive systems and capacity for freedom dreaming. We, the Collective, protected ourselves from racialized gaslighting and silencing through affirmation of our experiences. In reflecting on what our collective's conversations meant to her during the post-study answerability defense, Love explained,

> I could just be. It [The Collective] was a space where I didn't have to be silent… I didn't have to be politically correct. It was a space where I just, you know, it solidified within myself, I don't like silence. Silence is oppressive and I didn't have to be silent. I fell in love with not being silent. I kept thinking, you know, because of this Collective, I'm gonna say what I want to say every time.

Love shared how freedom dreaming led to protection praxis via her feeling insulated from institutional silencing. Love described how she felt emboldened in her efforts to name oppression in the freedom dreaming space and it may have translated to her day-to-day interactions. She had already shared several examples throughout the study about naming oppression in decision-making spaces and she felt the Collective helped increase this frequency. Her participation in the Collective's freedom dreaming led to her feeling insulated in saying what she wants to say regarding observed racism and oppression. Evident in Love's words is the critical praxis of co-creating and realizing the Collective was different than the day-to-day violence in which many Black and Indigenous educators are forced to maneuver.

Malcolm connected protection praxis to healing and extended Love's feelings at a reflection session that took place after the fourth collective session.

> Y'all…. it was different, It was a space where you didn't have to really mince your words around professionals that understood you. So, for me it was more therapy, you can call it Black therapy, because it was a... it was therapeutic in that there are not too many spaces…I can't name another space that existed that allowed all of us to kind of unload our experiences and process them.

Malcolm described a linking mechanism in how the authentic and reciprocal environment fostered a space where Black and Indigenous educators could feel affirmed in sharing their experiences. Again, this feeling was juxtaposed to day-to-day operations within educational policy systems that gaslight Black and Indigenous educators. Occasionally, gaslighting agents can have educator activists thinking and feeling like what they are experiencing is fabricated or that their dreams are not feasible. The Collective's reciprocal and relational knowledge co-creation space intervened in oppressive gaslighting and demonstrated a link to the educational policy praxis of protection. That is, the Collective protected each other from the racialized gaslighting as oppressive educational policy agents held no power in and were periphery to the conversational space. It was freedom dreaming's link to protection praxis that led to healing stemming from being able to collectively process positive and/or negative emotions, name oppressive educational policy experiences, and envision new futures.

Connection and Sustainment

Freedom dreaming's critical educational policy praxis resided in promoting connections to Black and Indigenous ancestors, each other, and the next generations of educational justice actors. Simultaneously, these connections bolstered comrades' sustainment. It makes most sense to concurrently write the argument for connection and sustainment praxis as I found these examples to be tightly coupled. In fact, similarity scores yielded a .90 coefficient. Ninety percent of the time I coded the *Grassroots, Movement, Coalition-building to Capture Power* category, or sustainment, I also coded

Intersectional work, or connection. The freedom dreaming coding category, or NSSP, also yielded a strong relationship with the Gr*assroots, Movement, Coalition-building to Capture Power* and *Intersectional Work* categories at a rate of 90%. These similarity coefficients provide evidence for the act of connection, through negotiating strategies among various actors' situatedness within interlocking systems of oppression, which demands a level of coalition/movement-building work to sustain and engage in freedom dreaming. Our collective's conversational data showed connection and sustainment as freedom dreaming's educational policy praxis in several ways.

The Collective's conversations connected freedom dreaming sustainment to strategies we shared and learned beyond western, white pedagogical practices. Specifically, Serena brought ideas from her ancestral co-learnings with Native ways of being and knowing. I asked Serena, the only Native comrade in the collective and current middle school teacher, a question that followed our deep awareness of anti-Black and settler colonial systems.

> Nate: …how do we fight some of these systems and imagine something new? [asked with an earnest, slightly defeated tone]
> Serena: No, completely. I went to a professional development and it was on teaching Native stories in classrooms and I was just shocked because we had all these different teachers in private schools knowing how to teach from Native knowledges. It's all group work, and it's projects and it's just taking Native learning paths.
> Nate: Right, and you know, I'm hopeful that we can (re)build these systems.

Rooted in Native storytelling are connections to students' ancestors' oral lessons. To Serena, Native learning paths (re)connect students with knowledges that white, western educational systems attempt to strip from them. Thus, Serena, in response to my question about imagining "something new," immediately thought of a Native-centered and ancestral practice in storying. Her narration of pedagogical activities supporting the younger generations' dreams and helping me quickly develop a more hopeful perspective. I would surmise that without our emerging relationship-building and Serena's decision to share her co-learnings, we both may have slipped into an unrecoverable despair within which settler colonial and anti-Black systems can place educators. Yet, Serena's response suggested a crucial educational policy praxis component to the freedom dreaming is in its ability to exchange stories about pedagogical circumvention strategies.

The strong relationship between NSSP and *Intersectional Work* may indicate a freedom-dreaming-praxis-linking mechanism resides in comrades' abilities to situate themselves within interlocking systems of oppression. Rosa demonstrated this link when describing being socially-constructed as Black and dis/abled. She starts by storying her role in her home community. Contextually, Rosa's storytelling followed my story about how my hometown had restricted Black boys' gifts to entertainment and athletics.

> Rosa: Yeah, it [Black people being limited by systems] is close to home… the schools are very punitive on kids for being Brown. And that's what started my involvement in restorative circles. So, I serve on the [region] which is the area I'm from, so just being able to support because the school-to-prison pipeline affects the Black and Brown community. So, any effort helping kids, the kids that are often shortchanged academically or racially. That's my sweet spot.

Rosa sets up her intersectional work by leaning into how racialized oppression "shortchanges" Black and Brown students in her home community in which she works. Later in our storywork, she described how her racialization as a Black woman converged with being deemed as having a dis/ability.

> Rosa: In high school, I challenged my IEP teacher and wanted to be released from my inclusion classes, my sophomore year. Let me tell you, my aunt, who was my legal guardian and I went through hell and high water because [the school] said "if you pull her from these classes. She's going to fail. She's going to not succeed. She's not going to make it. You're making the most terrible decision for your niece, don't do this." And she [Aunt] goes, "No, I think she wants to do it. We're working at home. We had a classroom in the kitchen, a dry erase board." And I did it, [the school] wanted me to go the [technical college route], they wanted me to go to cosmetology and learn how to do the nails, the hair, something tangible, something that's physical labor, something that's [they perceive to be] less complicated than going to college. I'm a person that likes being very competitive and I wanted to challenge that. I researched the most difficult jobs that I possibly could achieve. And I said, I'm going to do this. My goal in high school was to be a biomedical engineer, because it's something that they [doubters] would never think that Rosa would be able to do… let me tell you that's not the route [I went].
> Nate: (Laughs in a way to demonstrate pride and resonance)

Our storied exchanges started with racism-conscious discussions in describing white supremacist logics and how policy actors can construct Black students within narrow intellectual conditions. Then, Rosa built on my story and included how being socially-constructed as having a dis/ability situated her within racialized, gendered, and ableist educational policy systems. I wish manuscripts had the ability to provide audio to readers because my laugh while receiving Rosa's story reflected the strong sense of connection I felt with her in that moment. I resonated with how systems and anti-Black actors limited her, her decision to demonstrate her brilliant resistance via selecting biomedical engineering, and the comedic spin on not ending up in that profession. Our conversation showed that we ended up in our current professional roles, not because of any incapability, but in the realization that we needed to resist the potentially unhealthy sequence of ending up in a profession to prove oppressive people and systems wrong. Instead, we reflected on how we can prove those people who believed in us right. Reflecting on this conversation continues to make me smile. Connection praxis may link to an emotional intelligence capable of reflecting on how one's body receives stories. The way my body felt in response to Rosa's story transcends time and sustained our connection to each other in the Collective and well beyond our initial 1:1 conversations. The felt affirmation, evident in my smile and laughter, is seminal critical educational policy praxis because it can build the relational foundations for coalition/movement-building efforts.

An important and foundational link to freedom dreaming praxis was evident in how the Collective described just educational policies directed toward other educators in ensuring they are answerable to justice-oriented frameworks. The Collective discussed how we ensured students have the policy and classroom infrastructure to pursue collective freedom dreams. Here, educators and students' co-imaginaries are an inextricable link converging freedom dreaming and educational policy praxis. Akiea, an elementary school teacher, demonstrated the link advocating for the requirement of social justice dispositions, so students can engage in justice work to realize collective co-imaginaries and prepare the next generation of freedom dreamers.

> Akiea: There should be a policy where, yes, you should be socially justice-oriented if you're going to be in a classroom…so that you don't get in front of kids and have these really you know deficit model ways of interacting with children that kind of stops their activism before it even starts.

Akiea's knowledge contributions relate to Rosa's contributions to sustainment and connection and adds an inextricable link between educators and students' freedom dreaming. That is, educational justice movements must build their bases by inviting future generations of policy actors to the work. Inviting and building a justice-oriented base is an intentional strategy to establish an educational policy infrastructure making it easier to extend the invitation to students. This intergenerational work explicitly situates adult educators and students as partners in educational justice movements. Unequivocally, freedom dreaming holds critical educational policy praxis in connecting and seeking to sustain educators and students' collective efforts to dismantle oppressive systems. The link reminds Black and Indigenous educators about their role in passing ancestral knowledges that their relative have passed to them.

Implications/Discussion

Our Black and Indigenous collective's knowledge co-creation and my interpretations expose impracticality critiques because praxis is present in policy actors' protection, connection, and sustainment during freedom dreaming activities. The lists below offer readers my interpreted and concrete set of conversationally-evidenced critical educational policy praxis examples. Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming is critical educational policy praxis through *protection*…

(a) …setting educational policy process navigation and negotiation as a collective, reciprocal, and relational endeavor.
(b) …opening invitational space to refuse to perpetuate anti-Black and settler colonial ways of knowing and being.
(c) …engendering a sense of protection stemming from comrades' affirmation of lived experiences.

Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming is critical educational policy praxis through *connection and sustainment*…

(a) …exchanging storied strategies to circumvent oppressive educational policy structures.
(b) …transcending time and building relational foundations required to sustain coalition-building work.
(c) …strategizing how students can have the educational policy infrastructure to engage in collective freedom dreaming.

I imagine critically-situated educational policy scholars invoking, citing, and sharing these lists when faced with impracticality critiques incapable of understanding the praxis embedded in Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming.

The Collective's knowledge co-creation may contribute to the end of labeling what is practical in educational policy studies without explicit analysis of power and privilege (Diem et al., 2014; Diem et al., 2019; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020; Stewart & Goddard, 2024). Instead, educational policy scholars may shift to take up "the merits or power of the visions themselves" (Kelley, 2002, p. x). The praxis examples in the lists above are not exhaustive and nor are they intended for stringent conceptualizations. Yet, a reader may feel the power of freedom dreaming praxis being answerable to Black and Indigenous knowledges and their extensions. This Collective's conversations demonstrated how educational policy praxis may benefit from centering on Black and Indigenous definitions of practicality to assess freedom dreaming's merit through a different lens (Horsford et al., 2019; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; McKay, 2010). Our mobilization of freedom dreaming implicated how protection, connection, and sustainment praxis can inform critical approaches to educational policy studies.

First, the Collective's conversations showed how freedom dreaming may involve protection praxis and open space for collective healing. Love shared how she felt an emboldened sense of confidence in naming oppressive systems despite some institutional actors' attempts to silence her. Malcolm goes as far to say that his participation in freedom dreaming led to "Black therapy." Therefore, freedom dreaming may involve healing-centered praxis, perhaps the most important practice policy actors can do, because healing is directly linked to Black and/or Indigenous co-imaginaries (Stewart & Thompson, 2023; Wilson & Jackson, 2023). Healing-centered praxis is important because Black and Indigenous policy actors co-create spaces to process pain stemming from oppressive realities and learn to transgress them (Kokka & Coby, 2024). Oppressive realities can be debilitating and movement-ending; thus, heightening the need for collective and individual healing (Dumas, 2014; Dumas & ross, 2016). The Collective's knowledge co-creation extends Kokka's (2023) work describing how women of color educators directly connect their actions in promoting healing and communal well-being with helping students develop healthy relationships to "dominant mathematics" in protected classroom spaces (p. 9). In their classrooms, students and educators collectively mobilized mathematics education as a way to promote social justice, build relationships with each other, and identify patterns in nature. Kokka and her knowledge contributors' healing-centered efforts were bolstered by the educators' praxis of protection through freedom dreaming beyond the traditional mathematics classroom. Connecting to our collective's critical educational policy praxis, anti-Black and colonial actors' harm may be reduced when Black and Indigenous educators co-create spaces protecting each other and their students (Adams, 2023; Stovall, 2023). Here, Malcolm, Love, and the Collective's knowledge contributions link conceptualizations of freedom dreaming praxis to constructing healing spaces protected from oppressive policy actors' continued harm.

Second, Serena's conversational excerpt helps educational policy actors understand freedom dreaming as praxis in connection to ancestral knowledge and sharing circumvention strategies. She gave an example of how conversations surrounding Native learning paths have led to her hope for building new educational futures and this immediately engendered my sense of hope (Cajete, 1994; Smith, 2004). Our conversation extends San Pedro and Kinloch's (2017) dialogic storywork demonstrating connection praxis. Specifically, we build on the argument that connection praxis plays an essential role in the interconnectedness embedded in collective conceptualizations of educational justice. Unequivocally, Serena's dialogic acts extend connection praxis and demonstrates how Black and Indigenous educators may support each other and build relationships through the act of sharing what other justice-oriented policy actors have done to successfully circumvent oppressive educational policies. The act of acknowledging human connectedness and freedom dreaming within educators' strategic exchanges is critical educational policy praxis. Praxis resides in decisions to share what has worked so others can reevaluate what is possible and promote co-learning toward educational justice and action (Louis & King, 2024; Stewart, 2023; Stovall & Mosely, 2023; Warren & Coles, 2020; Welton & Harris, 2022). Protection and connection praxes may be important premises in centering freedom dreaming as an important practice in sustaining policy actors within educational justice movements.

Third, our collective's critical approach to educational policy studies illuminated the praxis of sustainment through inviting the next generation of justice-oriented policy actors. The strong relationship between coding categories, NSSP, *Grassroots, Movement, Coalition-building to Capture Power,* and *Intersectional Work,* demonstrated the Collective's stance in how educational justice work involves the practice of building coalitions with enough similarly-situated people co-creating dreaming spaces for present and future educational policy actors. Gutierrez and Lipman (2016) have conceptualized this work as social movement praxis and is the site where sustainment praxis extends knowledge co-creation. Social movement praxis involves deep contextualization, is messy and complicated, and

demands negotiating collective aims. Rosa and my conversational excerpts emulated how intersectional work engenders sustaining emotions galvanizing the energy needed for transgressive spaces (Stovall, 2023). Rosa and Akiea's connection and sustainment praxis adds to social movement practicality frames in naming how building movement and transgressive spaces involves relationality, invitations, intersectional work, and an emotional intelligence capable of understanding how policy actors' bodies receive stories.

Additionally, there is connection and sustainment praxis in educators' attempts to ensure students have the educational policy infrastructure, intergenerational understandings, and ancestral knowledges to dream. Returning to Aldana & Richards-Schuster (2021), the Collective's knowledge co-creation builds on how educational policy studies can learn from youth-invitation sustainment efforts. Partnerships with youth co-researchers, through invitations to knowledge co-creation projects, may engender heightened critical consciousness leading to student participation in social justice movements (Welton & Harris, 2020). Our Collective's knowledge extends Warren and Coles' (2020) conceptualizations of Black educational spaces (BES) and their potential to insulate, connect to, and sustain youth's freedom dreaming activities. Moreover, the Collective implicated intergenerational knowledge and international contexts in reconnections to ancestral freedom dreaming. I interpret one of these connections in how African disaporans can engage in dreaming praxis as an "anti-colonial realm of spiritual resurgence for Black and African peoples" (Dei, 2018, p. 136). The idea of spiritual resurgence articulates how building new futures must be a dreamed, negotiated, and contested *world* project—meaning it involves collective navigations of Blackness and Africanness between and among all teachers and learners. Our collective's knowledge co-creation contributes to student-centered scholarship and draws implications in how freedom dreaming praxis can be present at the convergence of international anti-coloniality, ancestral reconnection, and sustainment.

A Freedom Dreaming Praxis Manifesto

In this section, I share a thought exercise envisioning what educational policy studies futures could look and feel like when scholars and communities center on Black and Indigenous freedom dreaming's dynamic praxis. Here, I offer a *freedom dreaming praxis manifesto* for educational policy studies, inspired by Benjamin (2024), Hartman's (2012) critical fabulation, or telling stories engendering dispositions capable of orienting new futures where all people thrive, and my comrades' conversations. This freedom dreaming praxis manifesto is guided by my interpretation of the protection, connection, and sustainment evidence I forwarded in this study. Relationally, I contacted my comrades and shared the below thought exercise to make sure my writings aligned with our negotiations and ongoing freedom dreaming activities.

Let me tell you about our freedom dreams! We imagine codified teaching and learning processes, or educational policies, void of knowledge-creation hierarchies (Cajete, 2018; San Pedro & Kinlock, 2017; Thomas, 2005). Our co-imaginary provides educational policy actors space and resources to identify their ancestral gifts in knowledge creation and mobilize their talents to pursue a society where all people can thrive (Stewart, 2023; Green, 2023a). We envision systems-level educational policy actors' unapologetic efforts to repair historical and ongoing harm via reparatory justice centered on the experiences of racialized and marginalized communities (Stewart & Uanhoro, 2023). University-based educational policy actors no longer feel pressure to construct their knowledge co-creation, making it digestible for western, white practicality paradigms, and current university structures do not exist in the same exploitive ways (Patel, 2015; Stewart et al., 2024b). In our educational policy imaginary, we have exposed settler colonial and anti-Black ways of knowing and being to the point where these logics are obsolete and irrelevant, contributing to the manifestation of our collective dreams (Stewart et al., 2023). We dream of shared decision-making

power among people directly impacted by educational policy processes and loving negotiations lead to thriving for all (Caslin, 2021; CEA, 2022; Stewart & Thompson, 2023). Most importantly, we imagine educational policies to increase community capacity and ability to care for each other and heal (Crowder, 2021; Green, 2023b). This freedom dreaming praxis manifesto outlines our shared vision. Now, let's build and negotiate these futures.

Conclusion

Our one Black and Indigenous educator activist collective created knowledge in research spaces setting white, western, and oppressive educational policy paradigms at the periphery. Therefore, it would be illogical to attempt to measure policy practicality through paradigms from the white and western systems we seek to imagine beyond. We start with the assumption that impracticality critiques are deficient in their ability to understand the brilliance and dynamism of Black and Indigenous-defined practicality. Instead, our collective defines freedom dreaming praxis in how our imagination may be protected from oppressive policy, connected to ancestral dreams, and sustained through co-created relational infrastructure.

Framing freedom dreaming as a critical approach to educational policy studies may bolster Black and Indigenous collectives' arguments to shift practicality paradigms and center ancestral knowledges. The current study's Black and Indigenous collective's knowledge co-creation did this by exhibiting praxis of protection, connection, and sustainment. We understood freedom dreaming as a strategic approach, a sustaining fuel, and imaginative all at the same time. It is important to acknowledge that our collective is not the only group dreaming and building equitable futures and we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors. Further, it is important to re-emphasize the dynamism within and between Black and Indigenous educator activists' freedom dreams. I look forward to continuing to be in conversation and learn with similarly-situated, critical educational policy actors, our Black and Indigenous ancestors, and co-researchers as we collectively withstand and dismantle assaults from impracticality critiques.

I will conclude this article by writing directly to readers who selected this article as there are relational implications in how you found this written work. I recently attended a conversation between K. Wayne Yang and Eve Tuck at Macalester College. During the discussion portion, Dr. Tuck encouraged the audience to think of writing as "generous relation, a way of knowing and telling something we may be saying for the first time" (personal communication, March 2024). Her words catapulted me into an inward reflection, and I thought about my comrades' and my conversations over the course of the study that continue today. I thought about what generous and written offering could center relationality with readers invested in and committed to the power of freedom dreaming. I came up with affirming readers, especially Black and Indigenous readers who carry the legacies of their ancestors' co-imaginaries, that their dynamic relationship to freedom dreaming praxis resonates with me. Join me, and those ancestral shoulders on which we stand, in rendering impracticality critiques as irrelevant to Black and Indigenous dreaming practices. As hooks (1994) reminds us, we can sustain ourselves when realizing we are not alone.

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