Desegregation, the Attack on Public Education, and the Inadvertent Critiques of Social Justice Educators:
Implications for Teacher Education

By Thomas M. Philip

There is a growing recognition in teacher education that in order to work toward a more equitable and just society, programs of teacher education must explicitly engage with the political commitments of teachers and teacher educators (Cochran-Smith, 2005). They must prepare prospective teachers to address "societal structures that perpetuate injustice" and to engage in "individual and collective action [that mitigates] oppression" (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). From this perspective, it is critical that teachers understand "the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives"

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and the linkages between macro-level structures and micro-level classroom processes (Bartolomé, 2004). An essential aspect of such an understanding is what Bartolomé terms *ideological clarity*, which involves teachers' identification, comparison, and contrasting of dominant[1] society's "explanations for the existing socioeconomic and political hierarchy" with their own explanations (p. 98).

In this article, I build on this body of scholarship as well as theories of ideology and conceptual change

(Philip, 2011) to argue that we, as teacher educators, often fail to facilitate the development of important aspects of prospective teachers' ideological clarity when we promote broad critiques of injustice without attending to how these critiques are situated in contemporary efforts "to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56). To examine this argument more closely, I briefly explore the processes through which public institutions and spaces, particularly schools, have been undermined in California in the years leading up to and following the historic Civil Rights rulings and legislation of the 1950s and 1960s. Based on my experience as an instructor in teacher education courses that examine the historical, social, political, and economic contexts of schooling, and my work with prospective teachers more generally, I argue that social justice educators often re-voice and reaffirm well-intentioned critiques that inadvertently undermine the public, thereby continuing to deny equitable access, particularly to people of color, in the post-Civil Rights era (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003).

The Historical Roots of the Attack
on the Public through a Lens of Race and Racism

We are at a critical juncture with respect to the future of the public. Headlines incessantly repeat that public institutions, spaces, and services, which significantly benefited middle-class Whites during an earlier generation, are simply unsustainable in today's global economy. In the face of the severity of the current economic crisis, the reform or demise of the public is often a starting premise or foregone conclusion. The effects of the crisis and the lack of support for the public has had staggering effects on education: the Regents of the University of California tripled tuition from what it was a mere 10 years ago (Surdin, 2009) and have begun discussions about varying the system's fee structure in ways that might make it even more difficult for poor and first generation students to attend its most highly ranked campuses (Godon, 2011); the Board of Trustees of the California State University endorsed a cost-savings plan that reduced enrollment and effectively denied admission to tens of thousands of eligible students (Yost, 2008; Rivera, 2011); and, school districts across the state are reeling from drastic layoffs and cuts in services (Blume, 2010; Lee, 2011). The dreams of students in California continue to be deferred, denied, and deadened. Some believe these troubles are only temporary while others question the viability of a publicly funded educational system.

Another assessment, however, argues that the current crisis is a continuation of the assault on public education that has been years in the making, a product of California's "genteel racism" (HoSang, 2008) that has systematically defunded public services, spaces, and institutions after they were legally mandated to racially integrate. From this standpoint, social justice educators must rearticulate the contemporary attack on public education as a matter of Civil Rights, and they must work to fulfill the vision of the Civil Rights struggle to ensure that the resources and

commitments that existed for the public in affluent White segregated spaces become truly inclusive today. These efforts must occur at the institutional and systemic level, as well as the level of ideology. In this article, I focus on the ideological dimension and consider contemporary discourses regarding equity and educational reform, from the right and the left, which intentionally and unintentionally undermine the public. I also attempt to highlight the link between the attack on the public and the end of *de jure* segregation, which is often overlooked or explained merely as a factor that is reducible to economics. By taking this approach, I do not imply that the attack on the public is unidimensional and that it can be understood solely through a racial analysis. I acknowledge that multiple interrelated and converging factors, such as neoliberal free-market interests and the protection of Whiteness, have existed in a symbiotic relationship in recent decades and have contributed to the decline of the public (Lipman, 2004; Lipman & Hursch, 2007). My focus on the racialized dimension of the current attack on the public attempts to resurface its relationship to the history of segregation, which lingers in our discourse, but is increasingly obscured by claims of color-blindness.

Access to public institutions and services in the United States has always been racialized. As Olson (2002) points out, access was initially defined through citizenship that was only open to Whites. After the Civil War, it was limited through "segregation laws in the South and extralegal means of exclusion, intimidation, and terror throughout the nation [that were] tacitly sanctioned by the federal government" (Olson, 2002, p. 387). As Olson further argues, post-Civil Rights inclusion in the civic and public sphere did not necessarily amount to increased participation. While access to the public has been contested and has never been uniform for Whites or non-Whites across lines of class or gender, it has always been disproportionately denied to non-Whites. In the post-Civil Rights era, inequitable access to resources has been maintained, in part, through the use of coded terms, euphemisms, and the avoidance of overtly racialized expressions. Contemporary norms discourage the explicitly racialized language that political figures, such as Ronald Reagan, used in his campaign in support of Proposition 14 in 1964. Reagan's proclamation, as he worked with the California Real Estate Association to undo the Rumford Fair Housing Act and *reinstate* racial discrimination in housing revealed the racial undercurrents that propelled him to political power in the state and nation: "If an individual wants to discriminate against Negroes or others in selling or renting his house, it is his right to do so" (Mayer, 2007, p. 76). Reagan's words betrayed the campaign's racial motives, but as HoSang (2008) argues, the language and strategies in California's racialized political battles have generally been genteel and have been increasingly portrayed as colorblind over the years.

Policies that favor upper-class Whites have been framed progressively as a matter of individual rights that are universal and have nothing to do with race or class. Simultaneously, however, these policies have implicitly appealed to the fears and desires of upper-class Whites. For example, as HoSang describes, in 1979

when Senator Robbins introduced Proposition 1 to overturn mandatory interschool busing, he sent private solicitations to middle-class Whites through direct mailers that invoked White fear. It referenced "the nearby 'undesirable' areas that include large Black and Mexican American populations" to which White children might be bused (p. 300). Widely circulated campaign material, on the other hand, proudly declared that the apparent rationale to end busing was a concern for all children: "We love all kids: Vote Yes on Prop 1" (Oviatt Library Digital Archives). Similarly, when targeting diverse audiences, Robbins drew attention to the supposed common benefit of the proposition by actively allying himself with Chicanos, African Americans, and Asians who had concerns about the effects of busing on newly established bilingual education programs for which they had fought hard, as well as those who worried about the emotional effects and possible physical reprisals on students of color who were bused to schools that were overwhelmingly White (HoSang, 2008). Such dual framings, which universalized issues in some contexts, but tapped into White trepidations and yearnings in other settings, allowed Whites to simultaneously portray themselves as liberal and non-racist while vehemently protecting the privileges and power of White segregated spaces through supposedly democratic processes.

Genteel subversion and blatant refusal to integrate the public occurred in parallel throughout the nation. Boston's violent protests against busing (Formisano, 1991) and Atlanta's more politically tactful transitions (Kruse, 2005) are reminders that the North was not immune to brutal aggression and regions of the South managed to avoid overt hostility. An illustrative example of unconcealed refusal to integrate the public is that of Prince Edward County in Virginia (Brookover, 1993). In 1959, the county chose to close its entire public school system instead of integrating its White and Black schools. Through a private foundation, White residents created a network of private schools that were funded by public state tuition grants and county tax credits. These schools educated the county's White children and effectively denied *any* formal schooling to its Black children for five years. The assault on these African American children's right to public education continued until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1964 that the state tuition grants were unconstitutional. The genteel forms of racism evidenced in California or in cities such as Atlanta are often positively contrasted as beacons of goodwill and broadmindedness in contrast to Prince Edward County or to the hate and violence that characterized defining moments in the nation's history, such as the collusion between the National Guard and mobs of overtly racist segregationists in Little Rock (Anderson, 2010) or the complicity of local law enforcement in Mississippi with the Klu Klux Klan in the murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner during the Freedom Summer of 1964 (McAdam, 1988).

Kruse's analysis of the racial politics of Atlanta, which paralleled California's genteel racism, is particularly enlightening. He argues, as public spaces such as schools, parks, and recreational and transportation facilities desegregated, Whites,

particularly middle-class and wealthy Whites, created private and semi-private alternatives. They leveraged race-neutral policies that did not explicitly exclude others and, in fact, often operated under the guise of tolerance and acceptance. Most often they invoked supposed common or universal interests. These policies effectively maintained segregation and, in some instances, intensified inequality. They shaped nearly every facet of public life and ranged from publicly-subsidized incentives for private automobiles to the prohibition of school busing. The systemic outcomes of these policies were immensely detrimental to the Civil Rights cause. For instance, transportation policies that promoted private automobiles over public options were superficially benign from a racial perspective and offered a brand of American freedom that is characterized by unrestricted choice. However, these policies effectively decreased upper-class Whites' reliance on public integrated transportation, facilitated suburbs that were largely segregated, and lead to the demise of public transportation for poor people of color in many regions. Through these policies and choices, White residents did not simply withdraw physically to the suburbs or urban enclaves. They withdrew economically and opposed the use of taxes to support what was no longer their exclusive sphere. The contemporary attack on public education, and more generally, on the public, must be understood in the context of the historical moment when the public was legally mandated to include non-Whites.

Contemporary Ideologies

While White tax flight is illustrative in understanding the changing commitments to the public in the years closely preceding and following the historic Civil Rights legislation (Lipsitz, 1998), it does not explain the continued onslaught of attacks on the public despite the significant shifts in class and race demographics over the years. Even with the increased representation of people of color in the electorate, there has been a significant withdrawal of commitment to the public, matched by increased support of private alternatives that arguably continue to benefit upper-class and White residents the most. As Gramsci (1971) and Hall (1996) argue, inequitable social systems are maintained and supported, in part, through ideology that manifests in commonsensical ways of thinking about the world, which are based in people's real, but partial, experiences. There is nothing inherently natural or universal about such commonsensical understandings. They gain salience because of social structures and, in turn, also help to reproduce them. The ways in which we make sense of the public are wrought with such commonsense. In the contemporary political climate, the right has effectively associated the public with inefficiency, waste, and pandering to protected jobs, while private alternatives have been associated with innovation, efficiency, and progress.

The dominant associations about the public are not simply in the usage of the right, but imbue people's language across classes, races, and other stratifications of

society. We all partially make sense of our lives, our work, and our purpose through these meanings, and, to some degree, they name and limit the possible solutions for which we strive. While many of these meanings are framed in terms of universal benefit and even in the best interest of the most marginalized, they undermine broad access to public resources. It is essential for us to critically examine how dominant meanings form our own commonsense about social justice. Below, I discuss three statements that I hear, particularly in my work with new and beginning teachers, many of whom are firmly committed to the vision and work of a more just world. Prospective teachers often voice these critiques as they make sense of injustice and their role in mitigating oppression. These critiques are also often advanced by teacher educators to prompt and develop prospective teachers' understandings of social justice. Due to the highly contextual nature of processes such as ideological clarity (Philip, 2011) and given the ways in which the right has shaped common-sensical understandings about the public, prospective teachers often do not see the similarities between their critiques motivated by social justice and the dominant attacks on the public.

Critique 1:
"Young people in urban schools fail because their teachers don't care enough about them, don't connect to them, and don't teach content that is relevant to them."

Work by scholars such as (Valenzuela, 1999) speaks to the importance of authentic care and relevancy for student success. These are valuable and indispensible qualities that we, as educators, must use to gauge the purpose and effectiveness of our work. They should be central when we engage our colleagues in conversations about their practice. However, this often voiced critique takes caring and relevancy out of the structural context emphasized by Valenzuela and is made too often as an easy explanation for the injustices and inequities in our schools. It is often articulated in the same vein as dominant arguments that students would succeed if teachers were only more passionate, thoughtful, and engaging. In doing so, it individualizes the systemic and institutional problems that undermine effective public education by focusing on certain teachers. It bolsters the narrative that a hardworking teacher can make *the* difference and plays into the myth that schools would be successful if "teachers just gave it their all." In many ways, the right, the left, parents, schools, students, the media, and teachers themselves, continue to isolate teachers as the primary cause of educational disparity. As we place responsibility on individual teachers who are not able or willing to put forth extraordinary efforts to meet the needs of students, the conditions and resources that made it easier for teachers to engage in authentic caring and relevant curriculum—teaching assistants, resource specialists, materials, counselors, field trips, etc.—fade into the past era of segregated upper-class White schools.

Critical educators' emphasis on relevancy and care is often made in response to the right's narrow framing of student success as a matter of hard work, competition, and incentive. While these approaches form different sides of a debate, the terms of such debates do not include the fundamentally separate and unequal education that different groups of students receive in this country. The arguments must be expanded to highlight the importance of the distribution of resources, and how the decline of the public in the post-Civil Rights era has severely strangled access to resources to those who do not already possess them. Teachers must engage in authentic caring and relevant curriculum. Those who fall short of this expectation must be supported. Those who consistently cannot meet this requirement should not remain teachers. But, our critique cannot simply be a critical version of the dominant call for people, in this case teachers, to try harder despite a fundamentally unjust system. Our critique must focus on the ways in which public resources for an equitable and just education have been withdrawn.

Critique 2:
"Teachers need to stop making excuses about things outside the classroom and must hold high expectations. A good teacher can create a community of successful learners within his or her four walls regardless of what's happening on the outside."

The devastating effects of deficit-thinking, where teachers, schools, and society attribute the lack of student achievement to the values, behaviors, and choices of oppressed groups are extensively discussed by scholars such as Valencia and Solózano (1997). Such deficit models that presume and reproduce students' failure because of the color of their skin or the language they speak are rampant. Critiques, such as the one above, focus on expectations but negate the emphasis that Valencia and Solózano place on histories, institutions, and structures. The critique that teachers must focus on their practice within the classroom and hold high expectations for their students is important in countering notions of deficit. But, when we say that nothing outside of the classroom matters for a student's success, we are in effect standing by and witnessing the defunding of communities' health, nutrition, housing, employment, transportation, etc. We play into the myth that our students' current and future life situations and opportunities will be significantly different even if we do not work to transform this society's inequitable distribution of income, wealth, resources, and opportunities. We spend tireless hours with the hope of perfecting lessons so that all of our students will succeed, without asking ourselves what such success means in a society that requires stratified labor. We share heartfelt stories about how we have supported our students' needs through our own financial sacrifices and donations from friends, families, and private and corporate donors, without reminding ourselves that these individually significant actions pale in comparison to what we can collectively

achieve by demanding our federal and state governments' reinvestment in the public.

If we construct the narrative of successful schooling and a young person's future opportunity as dependent on teachers who wear themselves thin, it allows society to abdicate its responsibility to provide what should be inalienable, publicly guaranteed rights of shelter, employment, nutrition, health, and learning. In this multi-decade ideological shift from public to individual responsibility, both free-market proponents and social justice educators have increasingly highlighted the importance of local change through choice, charity, and faith-based organizations on the part of the right, and more commonly, sacrifice and community-based organizations for the left. Individual sacrifice and locally-initiated alternatives are undoubtedly essential for transformation, but we cannot lose sight of the systemic nature of inequity and injustice. Collective demands must be placed on the state and ourselves to ensure that public services and institutions fulfill their role of providing equitable access to and just distribution of resources. By emphasizing the role of individual sacrificing teachers, to the point of obscuring every other societal injustice in a young person's life, and presuming that we can do justice on our own, regardless of the lack of equity in resources and opportunities across communities, social justice educators inadvertently undermine the demand for equitably funded schools and community spaces and services.

Critique 3:
"School Districts are large bloated bureaucracies that are disconnected from the needs of students and teachers. Successful schools must be small, autonomous, and community-based."

While social justice educators place a distinguishing emphasis on community control in this critique, this line of reasoning parallels contemporary arguments from the right and some on the left that solutions lie with local choice and decentralization rather than with systemic change that addresses the racialized nature of wealth and income distribution in this country. The critique of disconnected districts is based on the assumption that it is their size and public nature, as opposed to processes of racism and classism and their increasingly severe underfunding over the years, which are responsible for the districts' alienation from the communities in which they are situated. Public schools for upper-class segregated White communities not only offered a wide array of services that connected schools and communities, but also provided stable, well-paying jobs. The employment and services generated were essential for a thriving community, both economically and educationally.

As these spaces were desegregated, they have become construed as vestiges of bloated institutions whose workers are unreasonably protected and not subject to free-market mechanisms that ensure efficiency and productivity. A well-funded public school district can and should continue to provide jobs with living wages

and a wide range of important services to the communities of which they are a part. Social justice educators must be on guard that in our critique of the alienation of schools from the communities of which they are a part, we are not undermining the importance of well-paid public jobs that serve a diverse range of the school's and community's needs.

Discussion

The public is one terrain on which access to and the distribution of resources are contested. Critiques, such as those examined above, inadvertently erode the foundation of state-supported public services and institutions. The unraveling of the public in the post-Civil Rights era works to preserve existing racialized inequality and constrains the possibility of the public to provide more equitable access to resources and opportunity. In light of HoSang (2008) and Kruse's (2005) analyses of political battles over busing, public transportation, housing, and recreational facilities, and Gramsci (1971) and Hall's (1996) arguments that dominant groups' values are propagated to reinforce their interests and control, the critiques above are examples of how challenges to current forms of oppression may ultimately still re-inscribe them. As Hall (1981) argues, we are often confined by the established topic and logic of the discourses that exist. "One element of the struggle, then, is to try to start the debate about [educational injustice] somewhere else" (p. 47). The underfunding of public services, institutions, and spaces in the post-Civil Rights era offers a context in which to rearticulate the critiques examined above.

As teacher educators, there are inherent challenges to delving deeply into forms of societal injustice and contextualizing them within the historical and contemporary discourse of the public. These difficulties include the constraints of time and the risk of excluding other analyses. On one hand, prospective teachers need some familiarity with the structural and ideological working of race, class, gender, sexuality, immigration, language, disability, and other socially constructed categories, how these categories are often used to oppress groups of peoples, and how they are, at times, used in forms of resistance. On the other hand, the critiques examined here demonstrate the deeply contextual nature of ideological clarity. Emerging perspectives on transfer, such as Wagner (2006), suggest that people do not possess abstracted principles that they can simply apply across situations. Instead, it requires "knowledge of the relation between the principle and the situation" (p. 66). Knowing that the attack on the public is linked to a history of Whiteness and segregation, or even recognizing such links in dominant discourse, does not necessarily mean that we can always notice the multiple commonsensical ways in which we inadvertently reproduce the attack on the public.

Ideological clarity is not a state. It is a situational process of sense-making and we do not simply posses or not possess ideological clarity. It is not sufficient that prospective teachers understand the general historical background or contemporary

campaigns that undermine the public. As a process so central to equitable school-ing and a just society, prospective teachers must be able to analyze the nuances of their discourse and practice through this lens. To extend Bartolomé's definition, ideological clarity must also entail making sense of how one's interpretations and explanations might be taken up in particular contexts and how one might strategi-cally position them to contest injustice. Given the critical juncture that we are in with respect to public education, addressing the attack on the public cannot be limited to a conversation or a course, but must be articulated across programs of teacher education.

A counter position to my interpretation of the critiques examined above is that these critiques are important, and, in and of themselves, these critiques are true. From such a position, we cannot shy away from these critiques simply because the right attempts to appropriate them. While I agree with the spirit of this position, drawing on the work of Gramsci (1971) and Hall (1996), I argue that prospective teachers must learn to recognize that these statements never exist in and of themselves. They exist imbued with historical meanings and with meanings that are constantly con-tested in social, political, and economic spaces as well as in everyday applications of commonsense (Omi & Winant, 1994). Prospective teachers must be aware that the meanings most accessible to people, and the usages with which their statements are most likely to be taken up, are dominant contemporary connotations.

As teacher educators, we must continue to help develop ideological clarity about issues such as teachers' care, deficit thinking, and impersonal institutions. But, as we engage with prospective teachers who have commitments to social jus-tice, those aspects can only be starting points. Ideological clarity must also entail an interrogation of the historical and contemporary context of phenomena such as the attack on public education and a deep examination of how our critiques, often times motivated by social justice, can contribute to further undermining the public. Within the constraints of a teacher education program, at some level, we must make compromises between breadth and depth. Given our current political climate and all that is at stake with the deterioration or demise of the public, strands such as an examination of the attack on public education within the historical and contemporary context of Civil Rights must be prioritized as a space of deep learning.

Conclusion

Social justice educators must move beyond the confines to which our critiques are limited by the right's articulation of the causes and solutions for inequity in schools. Our critiques have been framed in response to the right. They have progres-sively focused on individuals, such as teachers, rather than institutions and structures that reproduce inequity and injustice. This focus has led to the further deterioration of the public. The right has largely won the ideological battle by disassociating the defunding of the public from the struggles of integration. There is a historical

amnesia even among the left. The critiques discussed above are important when we examine our practice as educators. They are indispensible in our struggle and vision for education in a just world. But, these must be critiques that we use when we look at ourselves as educators. In our dialogue with others, we must move out from the ideological corner in which we have been pushed and demand that the same commitment to the public that existed in all-White upper-class neighborhoods is essential for an equitable and just society that is more inclusive today.

In our critiques such as those above, we cannot fall into the trap of individual-izing inequity or injustice as the discourse of the right prompts us to do. We cannot forget and must constantly emphasize that the rules of supporting the public changed when the public was forced to include non-Whites. This cannot be overlooked or understated. The form of our demands for a well-funded public will be unique to our contexts and positions, but they must be made. Our struggles and critiques cannot simply address the symptoms of defunded public services, spaces, and institutions. It must work to fulfill the vision and the struggle of those who demanded, along with educational desegregation, true social, political, and economic integration.

Footnote

[1] For brevity's sake, I will use McDonald and Zeichner (2009) and refer to teachers who address "societal structures that perpetuate injustice" and engage in "individual and collective action toward mitigating oppression" as social justice educators or as teachers committed to social justice. I use "left" and "critical" synonymously with this meaning of social justice. The terms "right" and "dominant" are used to connote discourses that explain the marginalization of groups in society primarily through a focus on their own values, choices, and behaviors.

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