

UC Berkeley

Berkeley Review of Education

Title

Editors' Introduction

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2br7k83n>

Journal

Berkeley Review of Education, 2(1)

Author

Editors, BRE

Publication Date

2011

DOI

10.5070/B82110019

Copyright Information

Copyright 2011 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Editors' Introduction

Public education in the United States has long been an embattled territory set squarely at the center of many political agendas. Recent iterations of such struggles are evidenced in severe budget cuts aggravated by a pervasive economic downturn, acute rhetoric about teacher quality and accountability, and curricula driven by increasing standardization. As we move forward into our second volume, the *Berkeley Review of Education (BRE)* invites readers to an in-depth consideration of the past, present, and future of public education in the U.S., with special emphasis on equity and diversity. The contributors to this issue challenge us to critically examine the underlying social and structural forces of inequality currently in place in the U.S. public educational system. These articles ask how historical precedents have shaped an educational system that disenfranchises certain populations more than others. They push us to take an honest look at where we are in this present moment, and, in particular, at who bears the brunt of this fiscal morass. The authors engage us in looking toward innovative practices and new mind-frames for a more ethical and equitable future in U.S. public education. These are the central questions we pose to each other and to you, our readers, as we work together in building a different future.

The issue is organized in three sections providing different areas for reflection: case studies, historical and policy analyses, and a space for discussion. Importantly, the authors of this issue also represent many of the different voices—teachers, advocates, activists, policy analysts, anthropologists, sociologists, and education scholars—implicated in the shaping of the future educational system in this country. The authors bring to this dialogue their diverse experiences and perspectives, from those grounded in everyday classroom and reform practices to those focused on the broader implications of educational policy and leadership.

Central Issues in U.S. Public Education

Three detailed case studies open the first section of this issue, highlighting how particular kinds of ideological, institutional, and societal structures—like poverty, queerness, and conceptions of race—influence youth's educational contexts and possibilities. Through a careful analysis of qualitative data, the articles in this section trace how mechanisms of exclusion work in our everyday realities, shaping how we think about our world and one another and influencing broader educational reform initiatives.

In "The politics of school reform: A broader and bolder approach for Newark," Pedro A. Noguera and Lauren Wells examine how national reform efforts have been largely unsuccessful through decontextualized approaches to school improvement. Turning to Newark's school reform project as an example, the authors offer a model of reform that positions schools as part of a larger social system. Through the integration of schools with community programs, local businesses, and social services, this model attempts to transform schools by addressing the complex web of political, social, and economic problems that often face youth in urban areas.

Considering the case study of Chicago public schools, Brian Galaviz, Jesus Palafox, Erica R. Meiners, and Therese Quinn investigate mechanisms of exclusion in the second

2 *Editors' Introduction*

article, “The militarization and the privatization of public schools.” The authors trace the relationship between the militarization and the increasing privatization of the Chicago public school system through the charter school movement. They detail unexamined discourses and consequences of this militarization, including the covert recruitment of low-income African-American and Latino students into a militaristic system. They argue that the militarization of schools promotes a gendered, racialized, and heteronormative worldview, attempting to erase difference and diversity, which has profound repercussions for our students’ identities and our educational institutions. At the end of the article, the authors, in line with this issue’s aims, offer a path forward through an extensive list of suggestions and resources for further action.

The last article of this section, “White kids: Identity construction, critical mass, and symbolic exclusion in high school cliques and other groups,” offers an examination of the ways young people understand and display their racial identity individually and in groups. Through the lenses of critical mass theory and whiteness studies, Kerstin Lueck and Hayley Steffen focus on the discursive and behavioral practices and strategies used in the everyday discourses of teens at two diverse, urban public high schools in California. The authors unpack the role of group size, power, and interaction in the racial awareness of white students in high school. Specifically, this case study shows that when white students lack critical mass, they are more aware of their racial identity and strategize with other minority groups to gain power, an output in clear contrast with the colorblind frame observed when whites are the majority group in school settings. This study sheds light on the ways in which our students take on ideologies and practices of race and power, thus reproducing and challenging societal structures of exclusion.

The State of Public Education in California (Voices from the Symposium)

In the next section of this issue, we turn our attention to the state of public education in California. As we began to shape this issue, the *Berkeley Review of Education* sponsored a symposium at U.C. Berkeley, inviting local politicians, policymakers, and educational researchers to discuss crucial issues concerning the economic, political, and social dimensions of public education in California. Despite it being a stormy day, on March 12th of 2010 hundreds of participants from local school districts—teachers, parents, students, district administrators, principals, and professors—attended the event to engage in a dialogue about the state of public education. The second section of the issue highlights two of the voices from this symposium—those of Cristina González and Bruce Fuller. In their respective talks both eloquently considered the past (how we got here) and the future (where we are going) in this difficult time for California’s schools.

Amid the backdrop of student protests and public outcry over the rising cost of higher education in California, Cristina González traces the contributions of past university presidents in “Hedgehogs and foxes at the crossroads: Leadership and diversity at the University of California.” González’s historical inquiry informs a new vision for California’s higher education system by looking at the leadership of Clark Kerr and David Gardner, each in different historical contexts and with contrasting management styles, illuminating the ways attention to diversity has been a pending curriculum in the U.C. system. Using Kerr’s metaphor of hedgehog and fox leadership styles, González argues that the University of California needs a new, hedgehog-like vision of systemic

excellence that puts diversity at the forefront of a transformed master plan.

In Bruce Fuller's piece entitled "From Reagan to Obama: Institutions, relationships, and the shrinking state," we present a transcript of the talk given at the *BRE* symposium. In this piece, Fuller focuses on recently opened spaces of educational reform in relation to the changing capability of the state as a centralized power to promote significant change in public schools. Offering an historical analysis of material and belief conditions, Fuller discusses new policy spaces developed in the context of a declining fiscal capacity and frustration over the lack of success of No Child Left Behind and its reauthorization. Lastly, Fuller examines how changing ideologies and different material conditions are shaping and opening new spaces of possibility for public education via the deregulation of school finance and a focus on the relationship between families and schools.

A Call for Action (Discussion)

In the final section, we turn even more clearly toward the future, as we consider next steps for public education in the U.S. This section presents two essays—the first by Rick Ayers and Bill Ayers and the second a response to Ayers and Ayers by Gretchen Brion-Meisels. By providing a "Call to Action" discussion section, we hope to highlight relevant questions of equity and diversity in public education in carving a path forward.

Ayers and Ayers, in "Living in the gutter: Conflict and contradiction in the neoliberal classroom," offer a provocative critique, arguing that the current educational system is fundamentally flawed because it is based on principles of student passivity, conformity, and obedience. They argue that we must radically transform schools, beginning first with the holistic principle of developing the whole person. Like Noguera and Wells, Ayers and Ayers argue that the path forward in developing whole people begins with connecting students to communities both inside and outside of school. They suggest breaking down walls separating institutions from others, implementing cross-curricular projects that value literacies important to youth in their everyday worlds, and decoupling schools from systems of discipline and punishment.

Gretchen Brion-Meisels, in her response entitled "From life in the gutter to a pedagogy of freedom: The importance of learning from young people," builds on Ayers and Ayers' argument by suggesting concrete ways to reframe debates on reform. Specifically, Brion-Meisels argues that both listening to and incorporating youth perspectives is key to moving toward pedagogies of equity and freedom. After briefly tracing how other institutions are working to engage all stakeholders—including young people—in decisions about their lives, Brion-Meisels offers specific examples of how this can be a sustainable and regular practice in public schooling. She ends by reaffirming Ayers and Ayers' central point, that any reform must begin by nurturing pedagogies of freedom, but points us toward the centrality of the principle of Ubuntu with which she begins her essay with: we are part of a greater whole that is diminished when any one of us is diminished.

The seven pieces in this issue engage the reader to think critically about the basis for reframing the U.S. public educational system. Each one of these articles speaks to fundamental aspects of our past, present, and future, and collectively they open up new conversations and practices for a better public education system. It is on this note that we look forward, toward our next issue, as we hope to broaden conversations about equity

4 *Editors' Introduction*

and diversity in education and to consider ways in which we are all connected—beyond the U.S. and beyond the schoolroom doors. We hope to consider how ethical and equitable pedagogical processes and practices are instantiated in families, in daycare centers, in afterschool programs, in workplaces, and in other contexts in which we learn and grow in our everyday lives. We invite our international colleagues to help us think about educational contexts beyond the U.S. and beyond the institution of schooling. We look forward to extending this conversation to new definitions and questions of what we mean by equity and diversity in educational contexts.

We would like to thank all of the authors, reviewers, present and past board members, and faculty advisers in their tireless work in preparing this issue. It was truly a collaborative effort and a labor of love.

The Editors