

What does it mean to teach in these times?

- Take a look at [Clayton, C. \(1989\). We can educate all our children. *The Nation*, 249\(4\), 132-135.](#)
- Identify a line that speaks to what seems to be the same about today—but also be attuned to what might be different.

“Whatever its bases, ambivalence about the worthiness of clientele in urban schools has structured both the diagnosis and prescription.” Look at what is happening with the opening of Philadelphia’s schools - I’m thinking of the meme which goes something like this: “If you haven’t talked about funding schools you can’t talk about opening them.” This line that Clayton wrote has also been true through every “reform” effort that has come to pass since she wrote it: charter schools, scripted curriculum, over testing students, withholding funding as a “punishment.” In fact, I hadn’t read this in a LONG time, and I felt a moment of some sort of shock that so much of it has been true and continues to be true.

“Underclass” dated language that demonstrates the shifting of language to so-called “race-neutral” terms despite the socio-political reality remaining the same. The words used now such as: low socio-economic status, at-risk, and similar generalized terms to devalue the agency of communities of color. It is significant that this concept is being used to highlight constructs to support certain assumptions connected to anti-Black sentiments.

“The at-risk designation no doubt began as a well-intentioned attempt to focus attention and resources those children most need. This original purpose loses much of its efficacy as the number of those “at risk” approximates, surpasses and then exceeds by far the children judged not to be. In those instances, “at risk” becomes as much a misnomer as the term “minority” in a school that is black and Latino.”

This section provides an additional example of educators pinpointing the use of language to undermine the purposes it is supposed to serve.

“Language is never neutral” -Paulo Freire

Jen:

“Educators are in a unique position to challenge the consensus by arguing that to treat the language spoken in a child’s home as “un-American” or otherwise illegitimate is cultural chauvinism and has nothing to do with education.”

I focused on Baldwin’s (1963) address, “Talk to Teachers,” a few times in my posts on TPS, and I think it’s because I’m continuously coming up against the fact that we still can’t “get it right” (Jeffries, 2018). I’m not sure how I feel about the last part of this sentence. In part, I think that this deficitizing of culture has EVERYTHING to do with education, but I also recognize that this form of White-washing occurs again and again, regardless of time or space. Clayton’s emphasis on how certain identities, primarily BIPOC, are named

"illegitimate" IS as relevant "then" as it is now. I'm wondering about how at the classroom, administrative, local/global levels we can continue to chip away (though I'm disinterested in "small chips" at this point).

Beth:

"Whether the children of the underclass, who are becoming the predominant clientele of urban public schools, are allowed to be educationally successful is a matter for society to decide."

This is tragic. I feel like this whole article just indicates that nothing has changed in the last 30 years of education. We are not transforming society.

I am not confident that we will ever will when there is a vision at the administrative level and with teacher leaders.

Maddie

"Proposing abandonment of the public schools would be unthinkable if the children served by those schools were white and middle class..."

This point strikes me especially right now as we see how families are able to/are reacting to school becoming something (more honest?). We see that for many, our public schools are childcare settings where hopefully the kids learn some stuff too, kind of like the neighbor who would watch me when my mom went back to work and gave me a space to do homework, but didn't quite teach me. However, we already see white and affluent families making plans to create "pods" and home schools for their kids, offering to pay teachers competitive rates. This is going to cause a huge exodus from public schools, as middle class and above folks will finally have an excuse to segregate their children further. And this makes me worry about a district like ours that is already so severely stratified even within designations like neighborhood school. I wonder if the fact that some families can and will provide their own alternative will influence the role of public schools going forward. However, we're already seeing that the district at least plans to turn our schools into (emotionally, not physically) sterile spaces for "learning" while their parents risk their lives at work. Teachers in poorer schools more populated by students of color will not only be more at risk of becoming ill or dying from this pandemic, but we will also have to watch as our students, their families, our colleagues, and other members of our community disappear. I have a lot of fear (personally, professionally) for what lies ahead and what this means for public schools in the long term. Whose schools will be safely protected?

Reed - is the black family to blame for the plights of the public schools? or have public schools caused the plight of the black family? (Which came first, the chicken or the egg?)

Lisa

If only the children were different (or had different parents from different social class, race or neighborhood), schools would succeed!

I hear this false narrative too often. I was a student when Clayton was superintendent, I was clueless that was how the system treats me and continues to see the students I teach. This brings up the model minority myth where a grade like B's is an Asian F's. The wedge that this hierarchy of "successful students" puts on the Asian American and black

communities It divides us into pieces, when we could have struggled through a long civil rights movement together. .

Alondra

"Encoded in much of the rhetoric of concern about the "plight" of the nation's public schools [is] more fundamental questions; whether this society seriously intends or even desires to educate the mostly black and Latino children who now occupy the majority of seats in its large public school systems." (p.132)

--This really resonated with me, especially now as we think of questions about funding our public school systems under the current state of the economy. When public school funding even becomes a question, the students that are affected the most are always poor students of color. What does that say about how we value their worth? When we feel like it is okay for students to attend unsafe schools, how much do value their life?

June

"Much of the impetus for school desegregation came from those who believed, conscientiously, that the academic performance of black children could be improved significantly *if only* black children and white children attended the same schools." (133)

I never thought critically about school desegregation until this year and the fact that black students entered white schools (and established institutions of white supremacy). This makes me think about schools like Masterman and Central where black students are told by teachers and peers that they are lucky to be there and should be grateful, while simultaneously experiencing trauma daily from these institutions.

Erica

"Because we know that classrooms, schools and school districts can work, and we know how to make them work, it is not unreasonable to conclude, as Edmonds did, that the continued "plight" of the urban public schools must reflect an unwillingness to make the fundamental political decision about whether a permanent underclass is acceptable and necessary. (p. 134)"

Underfunding, patchwork remedies, and the search for a silver bullet continue despite ample knowledge of what a comprehensive quality education should include.

Trey

"The children-at-risk rubric locates the problem at the level of the individual child, with the implicit suggestion that this is where the solution must begin" (top of p. 133).

This line strikes me because I think I've only come to this kind of clarity in the past 10 years or so. When I began teaching, I'm reflecting on the ideas that I had about what I was doing: providing young people with tools to change their communities. And I likely hold on to that idea today. But this also ignores the work I might do as a member of communities myself in which I too must be an advocate and vocal voter and protester and ally (in action, not as some kind of label). I can't shake the idea from local protests that "no good cop in a racist system" might translate to teaching as well: is it true that there may be "no good teacher in a racist system"? In what ways am I thinking about and fighting for changes to the systems I participate in, as a teacher? On a related note, I'm also thinking about some of the discourse around STEM participation and how many of

the interventions focus on student "interest" and engagement. However, I've found that it's not that students aren't interested or engaged...it's often that the STEM ecosystem pushes them out, excludes them...in a range of ways.

Sara:

"Educators are in a unique position to challenge that consensus... The future of urban public schools depends less on the development of a new pedagogy than on the emergence of a new politics" (135).

Looked at in combination, these two clips suggest a power that teachers can tap, that goes beyond the structural planning and curriculum within their classrooms. *This article is actually a call for teachers to be louder about what they know to be true*, I think. I was also struck by the sarcastic quote "If only children were different... schools could succeed!" It places the responsibility on teachers to advocate for and represent what students are actually like (and should be like) so that they can challenge the presumptions that they are "wrong" for this model that would otherwise work.

Tricia

"The future of urban public schools depends less on the development of new pedagogy than on the emergence of a new politics."

I am struck by how much the discussion and national rhetoric over the recent past has been about individual teachers and schools making the biggest difference. All the money, effort, attention that has gone into turnaround schools. We can do something to change our schools but it is more about political, communal, systemic change than it is about helping teachers learn to teach to the standards.

Rolyn

"Educating the children in urban schools is no mission impossible. Nor is it a mystery."

Our kids deserve to be given the best. Effective schools should be in place.