Title: You Can't Lecture Liberation: Building Collectives Across the Educator-Student Divide

Introduction: In working to advance racial justice and/or liberation, education scholars and practitioners alike have issued calls for the removal of carceral structures in schools, including police officers and punitive discipline policies; as well as an increase in educational systems that promote students' mental well-being through the cultivation of healthy educator-student relationships. These changes are often made through reform measures that are codified by district and central office leaders and implemented by educators in their everyday work with students. How far, though, can top-down reform measures reach into the racial and relational work of education? This article, a book chapter being reformatted for journal publication, brings us into a high school Biology and a U.S. History classroom at Charter School Network (CSN) in Chicago, for an ethnographic exploration of political action taken by nondominant (Black and queer) educators who occupy the ideological margins of their institution. In it, I use two teachers' classrooms to examine educator-student political relationship in the context of literature connecting student disciplinary outcomes to their academic achievement. I engage the classroom as a site of political struggle and ask how liberation-oriented educators can forge solidarity with their students in the context of classroom teaching. Given students' propensity to challenge their teachers in these rooms, I attended these classes to see how teachers balanced the tension between professional stability and political coalition: would they prioritize the apparent stability and calm of their classroom, or join hands with their students' attempts to politicize against their schooling enclosures?

Literature and Theory: Existing research offers some frameworks for how educators can build political coalition with their students in the classroom context. In contending with the intersection of their relational and political work with students, educators have been shown to engage in political action by teaching political clarity through instructional content and enacting politicized care through content delivery and classroom management. One of the ways that Black educators consistently protect Black children from the racialized harms endemic to schooling practices is by using instructional content to teach political clarity, which confronts the reality of oppressive systems and their function in schooling (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021; McKinney de Royston, 2020; Glass, 2004). Whereas political clarity can be taught through instructional material that is both culturally sustaining (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and academically rigorous; politicized care is a more intimate act that teaches critical self-awareness (Whittaker & Russell, 2023), identity development (Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Green et al., 2021), and transformative action (Whipp, 2013) in the face of racially oppressive systems. Enacting politicized care requires educators to see their own development and their students' development as interdependent processes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Lane, 2018; Uttamchandani, 2021) and to find ways to bend and/or operationalize school rules to meet their students learning and developmental needs (Palmer & Martinez, 2013). Instructional and care-based work have been theorized separately; however, they have not been well-studied in terms of the restrictions placed on educators' political work by their institutions, nor in ways that connect educators' political roles with students' engagement in resistance. The content that students learn cannot be meaningfully extricated from the context in which they learn it (Philip & Sengupta, 2020), begging additional theorization on the interlocking functions of politicized content and care

work. In this chapter, I conceive of the relationships that classroom teachers cultivate with their students as acts of resistance against a system that aims to prevent their political coalition.

Method: Data for this paper come from an ethnographic study of three high schools within Charter School Network (CSN), a public charter organization in Chicago that was in the midst of institutional reform to reinvent previously punitive and anti-Black discipline and academic codes. While case studies of two educators are included in this paper, the findings presented are the result of document analysis, semi-structured interviews with 73 educators, and over two years of participant observation. In my observation, I took up Maria Lugones's (2003) method of *faithful witnessing*, drawing also from Cindy Cruz's (2011) purposing of Lugones's method. I learned to read educators' actions for their assertions of political marginality– the subtext under the ed-speak common to professional interactions in schools, the sighs and sideways glances at leadership's addresses, and maneuvers to ignore or rework directions they did not agree with. In studying the possibilities for intergenerational solidarity building between educators and students, I also attended to the small movements of students responding to the adults around them- a hallway roamer as a dissident, a snuck-in AirPod or vape pen as both dissociation and refusal; noting not how often or how many students talk back, but the content and direction of their speaking up. I transcribed interviews using Otter.ai and coded interviews using Dedoose with a team of research assistants.

Findings: In this study, I use the stories of Lupe and Ruby to trace the strategies that these educators take up to resist their institutions' insistence on surveillance and punishment, especially insofar as these strategies are or are not received well by their students. I find that educators are subject to the same conditions of carceral enclosure that their students face, in their work within an institution that pits educators' professional survival against their students' collective liberation. Across the cases, I highlight themes in the use of liberatory pedagogy in lecture content, which is accepted and lauded by the institution. However, when educators attempt to work with students to apply their lectures on liberation to, in Lupe's case, the re-creation of student discipline systems, and in Ruby's case, transnational solidarity outside the context of the school, I find that the institution reliably intervenes by threatening teachers' employment. The paper concludes by underscoring the importance of persisting in principled struggle toward educator-student coalition, over evaluating the effectiveness of discrete liberatory strategies.

Implications: In the project of turning academic knowledge production from the project of naming inequality to action to dismantle oppressive systems, we must understand how liberatory strategies are both employed by individuals and restricted by institutions. This paper centers the importance of political movement that is collective, rather than individual, surfacing important tensions for the building of solidarity across the hierarchical divide between educators and students. By highlighting both strategies toward liberatory pedagogy and restrictions on those strategies, this paper brings to the forefront the continued importance of principled struggle, even when the systemic transformations that we struggle for do not immediately result from our work.

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