

On Ruptures, Portals and Opportunities: Advancing Educational Equity Amid Pandemic Divides

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Schools have not been the same since the COVID-19 pandemic forced educational administrators to close their doors in the spring of 2020. Educators worked feverishly to provide instruction virtually and ensure their students had access to food and medical care, all while juggling the fact that their very own families and communities were in crisis. Confusing public health messages exacerbated by the politicization of masks and vaccines and the continued assault on Black lives, civil rights, and democracy put school leaders in a particularly challenging situation. Racial inequities and inequalities became even worse amid what Darity, Hubbard, and Wright (2022) referred to as “the pandemic divide,” reflecting the multiple impacts of COVID-19 on wealth, housing, employment, health, and of course, education (Douglass Horsford, et. al, 2021).

Many in the education community considered the opportunities these ruptures in the “normal” way of doing school afforded us. In her essay, “The Pandemic is a Portal” (2020), Arundhati Roy reminded us, “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.” Educational theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) made the case for a “hard reset” in education through a “post-pandemic pedagogy” that is more culturally centered and appropriate for students placed at risk based on their racial or socioeconomic status or background. Both Roy and Ladson-Billings underscore the importance of resisting the return to “normal.”

Purpose of the Special Issue

This special issue is a reminder to all of us that we must resist that return. These contributions were first drafted during the middle of the pandemic, then revised as schools and the world began to open up. They continue to sit within a moment in time that is still fraught with uncertainty; and yet, the authors have offered reminders of what is possible, and urge us to consider the portals and opportunities that we want to embrace and cultivate. These pieces are windows into a moment that seems so long ago, but is still very much a part of where we still are today.

Taken together, these contributions offer lessons on what we might learn from centering families and communities and disrupting how we typically conceptualize school leadership. In the call, we asked for contributions that took up “the underexamined epistemologies of family and community members within the context of education, privileging their wisdom and ways of knowing as those nearest to the problem.” Our hope with this special issue was to interrogate who gets to be considered a leader; if we are to broaden our framing to include community educators, organizers, and multicultural liaisons are leaders, what is the role of systems-based leaders with formal authority and titles? How might we consider them both in relation to each other? The articles in this issue offer examples and ways forward for both, even as they grapple with the complexities of transforming entrenched systems.

Another tension exists in what theories and knowledge sources we include and privilege in the academic tradition, versus what is excluded and whose work is erased. As we take up Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter, and community-engaged scholarship in this issue and beyond, it is essential that we center the experiences and perspectives of the historically disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed (Douglass Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2019). In the same vein, as many Indigenous scholars have reminded us, we must also expand our conceptualization of

what constitutes theory and knowledge production beyond the narrow forms recognized by the colonizing academy (Archibald, 2008). Young people and communities are drawing from their experiential, familial, and ancestral knowledges to revitalize and generate new practices and understandings about community care, educational justice and movement building in this particular moment and in their own contexts. The pieces in this issue invite us to acknowledge and honor that lived theory as well and to interrogate possibilities for teaching and learning from these expansive forms of scholarship, theory and leadership in our collective efforts to foster the education our students deserve.

bell hooks reminded us that “whenever we love justice and stand on the side of justice we refuse simplistic binaries. We refuse to allow either/or thinking to cloud our judgment. We embrace the logic of both/and.” (hooks, 2003, p. 10). In the spirit of “both/and” Black feminist stances in the work of intersectional justice in education, we share this collection of research, commentaries, thought leadership and youth artwork. The authors, leaders and artists in this special issue offer us visions of the educational futures they are leading and realizing even now, ripe with complexities and potential, in this season of return and resistance.

Special Issue Editors’ Note: The APA style guide traditionally dictates the conventions of language we adhere to in the field of education; however, style guides typically privilege white-normative standards that do not reflect the sociopolitical commitments of scholars who are working to disrupt those norms. To that end, we made an explicit editorial decision to honor the choices of each contributor with respect to capitalizing “white” and other writing choices that honors non-dominant language. We further want to highlight that while we (Women of Color) deliberated this decision, we want to acknowledge that People of Color often expend time and energy on these debates when White/white people are uninterested because it changes nothing in their material reality.

References

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