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Teaching Trump: A Frame Analysis of Educators' Responses to 'the Trump Effect' in American Schools

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Abstract: This paper offers a frame analysis of educators' responses to the anti-democratic statements and actions of candidate-turned-president Donald J. Trump. It asks how educators responded to Trump, then answers by identifying three types of frames (motivational, diagnostic, and prognostic) that educators employed to make sense of the Trump phenomenon. Using democratic education theory and frame analysis, this paper finds that educators were motivated by legality, complicity, and morality to address Trump's anti-democratic statements with students. Educators framed the Trump problem in terms of historical precedent, present danger to democracy, and concern for the future. They framed the solution with new curricula, fact checking, and critical media literacy. This paper argues that educators assert collective democratic agency to uphold democratic norms in uncertain political times.

Keywords: democratic education; classroom controversy; frame analysis

Enseñando a Trump: Un análisis de las respuestas de los educadores al “efecto Trump” en las escuelas

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Resumen: Este artículo ofrece un análisis de las respuestas de los educadores a las declaraciones y acciones antidemocráticas del candidato convertido en presidente Donald J. Trump. Pregunta cómo respondieron los educadores a Trump, luego responde identificando tres tipos de marcos (motivacionales, de diagnóstico y de pronóstico) que los educadores emplearon para dar sentido al fenómeno Trump. Utilizando la teoría de la educación democrática y el análisis del marco, este documento encuentra que los educadores estaban motivados por la legalidad, la complicidad y la moralidad para abordar las declaraciones antidemocráticas de Trump con los estudiantes. Los educadores presentaron el problema de Trump en términos de precedente histórico, peligro presente para la democracia y preocupación por el futuro. Presentaron la solución con nuevos planes de estudio, verificación de datos y alfabetización mediática crítica. Este artículo sostiene que los educadores afirman la agencia democrática colectiva para defender las normas democráticas en tiempos políticos inciertos.

Palabras-clave: educación democrática; controversia en el aula; análisis de marcos

Ensinando Trump: Uma análise das respostas dos educadores ao “efeito Trump” nas escolas americanas

Resumo: Este artigo oferece uma análise das respostas dos educadores às declarações e ações antidemocráticas do candidato que se tornou presidente Donald J. Trump. Ele pergunta como os educadores responderam a Trump, então responde identificando três tipos de quadros (motivacional, diagnóstico e prognóstico) que os educadores empregaram para dar sentido ao fenômeno Trump. Usando a teoria da educação democrática e a análise do quadro, este artigo conclui que os educadores foram motivados pela legalidade, cumplicidade e moralidade para abordar as declarações antidemocráticas de Trump com os alunos. Os educadores apresentaram o problema de Trump em termos de precedente histórico, perigo presente para a democracia e preocupação com o futuro. Eles apresentaram a solução com novos currículos, checagem de fatos e educação crítica para a mídia. Este artigo argumenta que os educadores afirmam a agência democrática coletiva para defender as normas democráticas em tempos políticos incertos.

Palavras-chave: educação democrática; controvérsia em sala de aula; análise de quadro

Introduction

“Democracy is a most unnatural habit. People have no innate democratic instinct; we are not born yearning to set aside our own desires in favor of the majority’s” (Applebaum, 2018). Precisely because it is unnatural, democracy and its constituent habits must be carefully cultivated and explicitly taught in schools to engender a democratic society (Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 2019). Democratic society will not reproduce itself automatically unless education is designed to serve democracy by reproducing values like mutual respect, equality, fairness, and veracity (Gutmann, 1987). Therefore, in a democratic society, educators and schools play a critical role in the transmission of democratic habits and values (Dewey, 1916).

But what happens when democratic values come under attack from the highest office? What happens when there is substantial popular support for a movement that undermines democratic values? What happens when a president publicly disregards democratic values? Candidate-turned-President Donald J. Trump’s uncensored approach to politics and his direct access to the public through social media have broadcast his disregard for democratic norms for all to see. With the

support of many Americans, some of whom are educators, Trump has found an audience for a platform that devalues mutual respect, equality, fairness and veracity (Gutmann, 1987). When sanctioned by the highest office, this disdain for democracy trickles down. As University of California at San Diego professor Mica Pollock writes, “Young people have heard distorting claims about Mexicans as rapists to deport and distrust, of Muslims as violent anti-Americans who should be banned from entry to the United States, or African Americans as people living in hellish inner cities, of women as people to grope without permission, and of violence towards critics as an admirable position” (Strauss, 2016, November 6). Along similar lines, the Southern Poverty Law Center found that the 2016 campaign had a “profoundly negative effect on children and classrooms” as some students were “emboldened by the divisive, often juvenile rhetoric in the campaign,” while some children of color experienced an “alarming level of fear and anxiety” (SPLC, 2016). Meanwhile, the National Education Association (2016) catalogued stories of students using Trump’s “mean-spirited and racially charged rhetoric” to bully classmates; as a Sioux City, Iowa school counselor wrote, “Our students are watching and they mirror behavior they believe is acceptable” (NEA, 2016).

What is happening in schools reflects larger fissures in American society. Americans’ faith in and knowledge of democracy are plummeting (Applebaum, 2018) just as increasing political polarization has revived historic phenomena like white nationalism and emboldened a radical new progressivism (Packer, 2019). As the forces of extremism clash in schools (Packer, 2019; Rogers et al., 2017; SPLC, 2016; UCLA, 2018) and with the 2020 election cycle underway in the throes of a politicized global pandemic, it is time to look back at the last four years to ask how American educators have responded to Trump’s anti-democratic messages. This paper asks how American educators have responded to Trump’s anti-democratic statements and actions in their classrooms. Drawing on ideas from frame analysis, the paper considers three questions:

What motivational frames did educators invoke when deciding to talk about President Trump’s anti-democratic messages in their classrooms?

How did educators who chose to address Trump’s anti-democratic messages in the classroom frame this as a “problem”?

How did educators who chose to address Trump’s anti-democratic messages frame the “solution” to the problem?

For the purposes of this analysis, President Trump’s anti-democratic statements and actions, referred to here as “messages,” refer to candidate-turned-President Donald J. Trump’s malevolent characterizations of people and groups. Examples of *statements* along these lines include Trump’s comments about: “very fine people on both sides” in the Charlottesville white nationalism rally, Mexican migrants as “rapists,” “blood coming out of her wherever,” the “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” “grab ‘em by the pussy. You can do anything,” and “get that son of a bitch [Colin Kaepernick] off the field.” In addition to comments like these, Trump acted in ways that violate democratic values, including his proposal for a national Muslim registry, mockery of a disabled reporter, and tolerance of violent chants at rallies constitute. Collectively, whether comments or actions, these *messages* suggest Trump’s tolerance of white supremacy, malicious characterization of immigrants, willingness to violate international law to kill innocents, sexist discrimination, Islamophobia, comfort with sexual assault, and intolerance of patriotic dissent.

Political scientist Meira Levinson (2016) raised a fascinating question pertinent to this analysis about where to draw the line in addressing Trump’s anti-democratic statements in the classroom. In 2016, Levinson pointed out the “ethical dilemma raised by the current presidential election: namely, which of Donald Trump’s outrageous statements, if any, educators should teach

their students to reject outright as a matter of principle, versus those which they encourage students to treat as legitimately controversial.” This paper works from the premise that educators *must* reject anti-democratic statements outright and denies that any of Trump’s statements or actions cited above are controversial at all. Along these lines, politics professor Benjamin Knoll (2016) rightly emphasized that “reasonable people can disagree, for example, on desirable levels of taxation or the merits of medicinal marijuana. It is not controversial, however, to assert that racism is bad.” This paper shares the assumption that schools cannot treat Trump’s “sexist, racist, anti-Muslim, or pro-torture and anti-human rights statements as matters of legitimate controversy” (Sullivan, 2016).

Yet we know that nearly one third of secondary educators supported Trump in 2016 (Klein, 2017). But this fact *should* not conflict with a defense of democracy since partisanship is beside the point. As participants in an active majority party, Trump’s educator supporters have every reason to celebrate democratic processes, norms, and values with their students. In this analysis, I do not assume that individuals who support Trump intend to undermine democracy. Any educator who is committed to democracy and who is facing a classroom of American students should consider problematizing some of Trump’s rhetoric in order to promote democratic pedagogies in an era of controversy and polarization.

Theoretical Framework and Method

To explore how American educators have responded to Trump’s anti-democratic statements and actions in their classrooms, I examined a body of media artifacts that represent a discourse constructed by educators during Trump’s 2016 presidential bid and first term in office. This gave me the opportunity to examine the media discourse authored by educators as it unfolded for the public to see online. This article is a frame analysis of the discourse that educators made available in public spaces like newspapers, blogs, public letters, and editorials. The sample is not representative of all educators since it relies on the ideas of those who chose to write, but it does reveal how some educators responded to Trump in real time. This discourse is a useful tool for understanding how educators made sense of political controversy as it unfolded in public life and classrooms alike. I used frame analysis to look across this discourse to analyze communication in light of larger issues related to democracy and education.

Frame analysis is an interpretive activity drawn from communications theory that reveals “the general patterns and tendencies of what is being talked about, by whom, and in what ways” (Johnston, 1995, p. 218). Grounded in the history of social movements and mass media analysis, frame theory offers “conceptual tools for investigating the ways in which ideas are produced and invoked to mobilize people into action” (Coburn, 2006, p. 346; Goffman, 1974). Citing Goffman (1974) and Snow and Benford (1988), Johnston (1995, p. 217) defined frames as “mental orientations” that organize perception and interpretation, or “problem-solving schemata, stored in memory, for the interpretive task of making sense of presenting situations.” The origins of frame theory in communications, social movements, politics, and media analysis make it the right tool to examine a discourse of educator activism responding to political tumult in the media.

This paper analyzes three types of frames in educators’ public discourse about teaching Trump—motivational, diagnostic and prognostic. These are particularly relevant for unpacking politically-charged discourse. Motivational frames (Benford, 1993) name the forces that speakers use to convince social movement participants to act; they get at the underlying motives behind individual activism in the midst of social change. Diagnostic frames identify how a *problem* is constructed, including who or what is to blame, while prognostic frames identify the closely-related solutions to the problem (Snow & Benford, 1992). Coburn (1996, p. 344) wrote that “framing is

crucial because it assigns responsibility and creates rationales that authorize some policy solutions and not others.” Identifying and analyzing frames illuminates *who* constructs problems and defines solutions. Because, as Coborn (2006, p. 347) suggests, “negotiation among and between frames is likely to be shaped by structures of power and authority an analytic tool that elucidates the power dynamics of the larger educational system, democratic education theory.”

Democratic education theorists concern themselves with questions of structure, authority, power, belonging, deliberation, equality, and justice in democratic societies. They ask questions about *whom* and *what purposes* education serve in a democracy while carefully minding the difference between ideal democracy and real democracy (Castro & Knowles, 2017). Like frame theory, democratic education theory emphasizes who is in charge: issues related to *who* is allowed to ask and answer questions about knowledge and teaching are “part of a parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in society” (Apple, 1993, p. 222).

Several precepts of democratic education theory are relevant to this analysis. First, it is assumed that in a democratic society, education services democracy by educating future citizens (Gutmann, 1987). As Applebaum (2018) noted, democracy must be carefully cultivated because it does not reproduce itself automatically. Second, from the perspective of democratic education theory, it is understood that education is an inherently politicized act because it is tethered to the principles and values of democracy (Apple, 2003; Hess & McAvoy, 2016). This means that education is charged by its commitment to uphold democratic principles, that the teaching of democratic norms in schools must be conscious, and that educators must be intentional about what is taught if democracy is to live on. Third, democratic education theory assumes core democratic values that democratic education should theoretically secure for all children—liberty, opportunity, mutual respect, equality, and fairness (Gutmann, 2018; Hess & McAvoy, 2016). Democratic education embraces the exercise and practice of dissent which is essential to the maintenance and the health of democracy, particularly in the midst of rising authoritarianism (Westheimer, 2006). Finally, democratic education secures in children the virtues of “veracity, nonviolence, practical judgement, civic integrity and magnanimity” (Gutmann, 1987, p. xiii). The language and orientation of democratic education theory helps situate the thematic frames that emerged from this analysis as part of a mounting professional defense for democratic education in schools during the Trump era.

Research Design, Data and Analysis

To conduct this analysis, I collected 55 blogs, articles, and editorials published online by educators between March 2016 and November 2019. I initially located the discourse after reading an open letter written by ten former “Educators of the Year” that was published in *The Washington Post* in October 2016. The letter denounced candidate Trump as a “danger to society” and countered Trump’s attacks on minorities, women, disabled people, Muslims, immigrants with democratic values of “civility, equality and dignity for all” (Strauss, 2016). This led me to wonder how other educators understood Trump’s visible and controversial political rise. Using Google, I searched the phrases “teaching Trump,” “teaching the 2016 election,” and “Trump in the classroom.” This yielded an initial sample of artifacts that snowballed into a web of hyperlinked articles, blogs and editorials. I kept track of these artifacts in an electronic matrix. Because the debate about Trump among educators unfolded in the public sphere and became a conversation among educators, the artifacts spoke to one another over time using hyperlinks in a web of mutual reference. I repeated the original search monthly between April 2018 and December 2019, totaling 20 months.

Twenty of the 55 artifacts were published before the 2016 election. Forty-two of the 55 articles were written by educators and thirteen by education correspondents who interviewed educators. Some of the articles written by educators represented the beliefs of organizations such as

Teaching Tolerance or Rethinking Schools. Artifacts came from national print sources such as *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic* as well as local newspapers like *The Charlotte Observer* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. See Table 1 for a sample of artifact titles with hyperlinks.

Table 1

Sample of Artifacts Used in this Frame Analysis (with Hyperlinks)

Title with Hyperlink	Author	Publication	Date of Publication
The Challenges of Teaching Civics in the Age of Trump	Kyle Redford	<i>Education Week</i>	March 29, 2016
Teaching Donald Trump: What Is a College Professor to Do?	Benjamin Knoll	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	June 8, 2016
Balanced presentation a dishonest exercise in presidential race	Kathleen Iannello	<i>The Philadelphia Inquirer</i>	August 7, 2016
Here's how I'll teach Trump to my college students this fall	Zach Messitte	<i>The Washington Post</i>	August 11, 2016
Teaching the 2016 Election with Integrity	Jonathan Gold	<i>Medium</i>	August 25, 2016
A Message from Our Director	Maureen Costello	<i>Teaching Tolerance</i>	September 1, 2016
The Tricky Task of Teaching About Trump	Peter Schmidt	<i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i>	October 28, 2016
Educators Are Abandoning Political Neutrality in Schools	Jon Miltmore	<i>Intellectual Takeout</i>	July 12, 2017
Should Educators Talk Trump in Class?	Ruben Brosbe	<i>Bright Magazine</i>	November 3, 2017
Teaching in Trump's America: Debating with decency isn't easy when the president is profane	Jonathan Zimmerman	<i>The Philadelphia Inquirer</i>	January 15, 2018

The educators who authored pieces and offered interviews represent a nationwide array of primary, secondary and tertiary perspectives, and disciplinary lenses. The educators quoted in this analysis work at varied institutions and positions in private and public education, secondary and higher education, urban centers and rural townships, red states and blue states. Ranging from graduate political science to secondary social studies to undergraduate history educator education, the artifacts analyzed in this article come mostly from the humanities and social sciences, representing history, social studies, English, political science and international relations. Looking for perspectives from the classroom and from the experts, I intentionally sought out the perspectives of secondary educators and university professors, collectively referred to in this paper as "educators."

Knowing that constraints on speech vary by institutional context (for example, that university professors generally have more latitude with speech than public school educators), I wanted to capture as many perspectives as possible.

Using general thematic methods of qualitative research (Miles et al., 2014), I coded each article for emergent and recurring themes in the discourse. I looked for overlapping and thematic consistency in language to develop codes in order to categorize text into motivational, diagnostic and prognostic language. I then applied these codes to the artifacts and stored all relevant text in an electronic matrix that allowed me to examine coded material in adjacent cells in order to generate assertions (Erickson, 1986) about each frame.

I began paying attention to how educators dealt with the Trump phenomenon after feeling uncertain about my own practice as a high school history educator during the 2016 election. I knew intuitively how controversial Trump's messages were, yet my participatory democratic mission as a history educator wouldn't let me turn away from the topic. I turned to editorials and blogs to understand how other educators dealt with Trump's anti-democratic messages on a logistical level (What did other educators do? Had they met resistance? From whom? What were the limits of appropriate educator speech?) and a personally-charged professional level (How did others reconcile the urge to condemn Trump's anti-democratic language and signal safety to students while respecting all families' rights?). In reading across articles, I began to see commonalities in how educators framed their responses to the Trump phenomenon in schools. I felt that synthesizing all of these perspectives could help educators like me make informed decisions about classroom practice by considering multiple perspectives. With the idea of framing in mind, I read each artifact to identify motivational, prognostic, and diagnostic perspectives. To do so, I captured direct passages of text in an electronic matrix to organize and categorize excerpts by source and date. I searched for thematic repetition across the excerpts to identify the frames that educators repeatedly invoked when making the decision to address Trump's anti-democratic messages with students. These frames make up the findings of paper.

Literature Review & Educational Context

Since 2016, many educators have grappled with the complexities of whether to address Trump in their classrooms. The president of New York City Outward Bound School Richard Stopol (2019) wrote, Trump "is posing immense challenges that educators across the country are having to reckon with... Through words and actions, he is profoundly affecting how educators see their role and influencing both how and what they teach." In 2016, university professors Benjamin Justice and Jason Stanley wrote, "Teaching in the time of Trump raises a fundamental pedagogical question: is it permissible for a educator to adopt a non-neutral political stance in the classroom, either through explicitly addressing the problems with Trump's rhetoric or, conversely, by remaining silent in the face of it?" In other words, the argument here is that Trump did away with the guise of educator neutrality by politicizing all forms of educator action and inaction, forcing every educator into *some* kind of inevitable response.

Under Trump, "national political discourse has become a more potent force in shaping the consciousness and everyday experiences of Americans," including those experiences that take place in schools (Rogers et al., 2017). In California, high school English educator Wilson Taylor reported that his "annual discussion of Sophocles' *Antigone*—a tale of national and familial anxiety in ancient Greece—turned into a discussion about Trump" (Voght, 2017). In Ohio, social studies educator Stephen Uhlhorn said, "I'm teaching Ancient Rome right now to my seventh graders, and we're covering Hadrian's wall, and so the kids are like 'the wall doesn't work,' and other kids are a little more like 'we have to keep people out.' So even when you're not covering Trump or current events,

things come up” (Timsit, 2019). And rarely is Trump talk uncontroversial—the SPLC found that “the word ‘Trump’ [was] enough to derail a class” (Rogers et al., 2017).

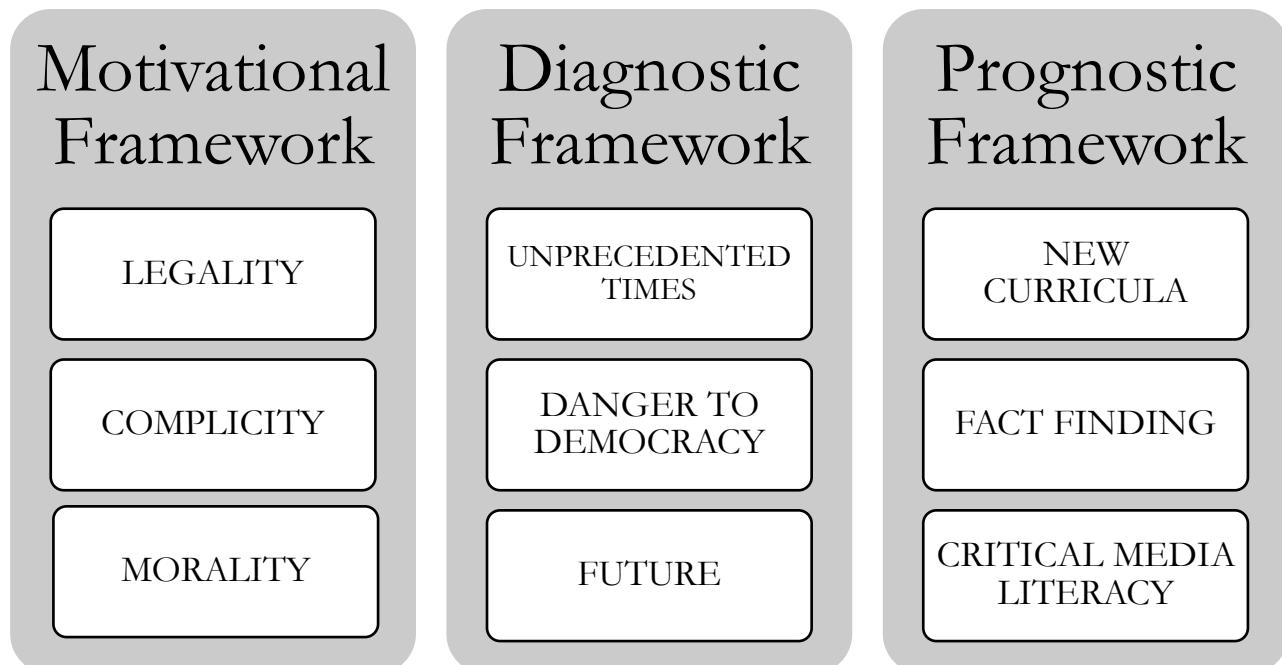
What these examples suggest is that Trump is already in American classrooms whether educators choose to acknowledge him or not. UCLA’s recent survey of principals (2019) found that “eighty-nine percent of principals reported that incivility and contentiousness in the broader political environment has considerably affected their school community.” ProPublica’s “Documenting Hate” project catalogued over 149 incidents in which students invoked Trump’s name to bully a classmate. During the 2016 election season, many principals told educators to refrain from discussing the election altogether (SPLC, 2016). However, UCLA’s study found that “when leaders did not act, student behavior grew dramatically worse” (Rogers et al., 2017), which is why we need to know *how* and *why* school leaders have acted over the past four years.

Given the complexity of the pedagogical question Trump poses, the ubiquity of Trump talk in schools (particularly during the election season), and the importance of taking informed action to prevent student incivility, it is important to revisit the actions and reactions of educators who reflected on what it was like to teach during Trump’s first run and term in office. To do so, this analysis focuses on three types of overarching frames employed by educators who chose to talk about Trump’s anti-democratic statements and actions in their classrooms and share this with the media. These frameworks help us understand why educators decided to address Trump in the classroom, how they understood the Trump problem, and how they conceptualized the solution.

Findings: A Framework for Democratically-Informed Professional Judgement

Figure 1

Frames and Sub-Frames in Educators’ Discourse about Teaching Trump



The Motivational Frame

Based on my analysis of the discourse of 55 items, I identified a motivational frame in educators' commentaries about the decision to talk about President Trump's anti-democratic rhetoric in their classrooms. Three distinct frames emerged within the motivational framework pertaining to legality, complicity and morality. These motivational sub-frames help us understand what compelled these individual educators to act (Benford, 1993). A shared sense of urgency about the need to speak out motivated educators to talk to their students and turn to a virtual network of colleagues to figure out the nuances of talking about the controversial president in their classrooms. These motivational frames help us understand the dimensions of that decision in three distinct ways. The legal frame has to do with the concept of educator neutrality as a legal matter that governs educators' livelihoods. The complicity frame is an expression of conscience that deal with educators' sense of democratic responsibility. The morality frame is an ethical matter of defending children's multi-layered identities from presidential attack. Oftentimes, educators invoke all three, even when they appear to conflict. For an example, one educator might feel legally constrained *and* simultaneously morally compelled to talk about Trump. However dynamic the relationship between frames, there is always distinct coded language that suggests different underlying logic. What follows is a detailed analysis of each frame that rests on the words of educators to elucidate a framework for why these educators feel motivated to talk about Trump's anti-democratic messages in their classrooms.

Legality Frame

The legality frame has to do with educator neutrality as a legal matter. Per New York state law regarding elections, "While on duty or in contact with students, all school personnel shall maintain a posture of complete neutrality with respect to all candidates" (NYC DOE, 2008). Educator neutrality is law in many districts, and even where neutrality is not enshrined in law, educators are expected to remain politically neutral in classrooms (Strauss, 2016). But "in the unprecedented 2016 presidential election, some educators are casting aside neutrality to speak their mind" (Strauss, 2016), despite fears that "there's this big hammer that's standing over us all the time, ready to punish us" (Brosbe, 2017). Legal fears motivated by the "murkiness" of whether educator speech is protected in classrooms (Singer, 2017) left public school educators feeling vulnerable on account of their state employment. For public school educators, "What you say or communicate *inside* the classroom is considered speech on behalf of the school district and therefore will not be entitled to much protection" (ACLU, 2016). However, many educators concluded that "a educator isn't being neutral by not intervening when a student chants: 'Build a wall' or any of the other similar exclamations we have heard since the presidential election" (Wiseman, 2017). The legal frame seemed to motivate educators to consider whether standing up for democratic values constituted a violation of neutrality, a serious offense that can result in termination. Educators who chose to take on Trump's anti-democratic rhetoric in their classrooms concluded that the preservation of democratic norms in schools did not constitute a legal violation of neutrality thereby allowing themselves to address Trump's anti-democratic messages in their classrooms with students. As one educator put it, when it comes to protecting students' democratic integrity, "none of us should be neutral about that" (Wiseman, 2017). Framing the decision to talk about Trump's anti-democratic messages in legal terms often meant educators evaluating the terms of their own employment and facing the possibility of violating district or institutional policy, which can be very unforgiving for educators who are judged to be violating neutrality (Sole, 2019; Spahr, 2016).

Complicity Frame

In addition to focusing on legality, educators were also motivated to talk about Trump's rhetoric with their students by their concerns about two types of complicity: complicity in the destruction of democracy and complicity in the normalization of Trump's views. For example, a concerned social studies educator in upstate New York said, "As educators, it would be unconscionable for us to remain neutral while our fundamental values are under attack. Neutrality would render us complicit in the destruction of our democracy" (Dolan, 2017). This educators' comments reflect the comments of some other educators motivated to act because of the threat they perceived Donald Trump poses to democratic values, elaborated later, and the desire to teach 'fundamental values' to secure the future of democracy. Other educators were motivated by the fear that students would interpret their silence as complicity with Trump's message. A Massachusetts high school history educator asked, "Do students take my silent and neutral behavior as a sign of apathy or endorsement of Trump's views?" (Cutler, 2018). Concerned that silence was the "voice of complicity," many educators were motivated to address Trump's anti-democratic messages in their classrooms to demonstrate that they "welcome all children into our classrooms, regardless of the color of their skin, how much money their parents make, or their religious beliefs" since "equality is at the heart of what it means to be an American" (Strauss, 2016 October). These educators acted out of desire to explicitly demonstrate non-complicity and to model civic engagement for democratic norms in an era when fundamental democratic values have come under attack from the highest office.

Morality Frame

For many educators, the decision to talk about Trump with students was "moral rather than just legal" (Strauss, 2016 October). The final frame, the morality frame, draws on how educators' moral reactions to Trump affect their professional judgement. In 2016, ten former "Educators of the Year" wrote, "But there are times when a moral imperative outweighs traditional social norms... This year's presidential election is one such time" (Strauss, 2016). Some educators framed the decision to address Trump's messages in their classrooms with personal moral conviction; others framed morality as a student outcome,. For example, Rhode Island middle school history educator Jonathan Gold (2016) invoked educators' "charge to make our students better thinkers, better people, better citizens; we set out to cultivate moral, rational beings who seek to make the world a better place." By defining morality as an outcome of schooling, Gold argued, educators should intervene in response to Trump's anti-democratic messages to uphold democratically-inspired morals like equality, justice and respect. Morality, whether educators' or students', figures heavily into the discourse about Trump, neutrality, and educators' democratic responsibility. One educator went so far as to evoke emancipation by quoting Lincoln during the Civil War: "It is a sin to be silent when it is your duty to protest" (Cutler, 2018).

However educators decided to frame the decision to talk about Trump in their classrooms, "educators who feel compelled to temporarily break with political neutrality are not so much taking sides on controversial issues as they are taking a stand against a candidate whose campaign, in their eyes, reflects a disdain for basic values of civility and mutual respect" (*The Economist*, 2016). This discourse is not about whether educators *like* or *dislike* Donald Trump or his policies. It is about upholding and modeling the tenets of American democracy in classrooms nationwide by making sure that students know that Trump's malevolent characterizations of people as "rapists" or "sons of bitches" are inconsistent with the democratic values of mutual respect, tolerance, equality and fairness (Gutmann, 1987).

The Diagnostic Frame

The second section of this analysis identifies a diagnostic frame that educators used to articulate the problem that Trump presents to educators of American democracy. Unpacking this frame helps us understand how educators conceptualized the Trump problem and why they felt it had to be addressed in American schools. The diagnostic frame is comprised of three interrelated sub-frames: the unprecedented times frame, the danger to democracy frame, and the future frame. Together they capture the extraordinary nature of a political moment driven by Trump's personality, the importance of actively upholding democratic norms to stabilize society, and the reason that guardians of democracy must always be forward-thinking. In a way, the diagnostic framework refers to the past (unprecedented times), present (danger to democracy) and future (future) in problematizing Trump in the classroom. This framework helps us understand how these educators understood the problem that Trump posed to democratic values through the lens of the classroom.

Unprecedented Times Frame

Many educators felt a pressing need to explain how historically uncharacteristic Trump's public statements and actions were for an American president. These educators framed the importance of talking about Trump with students in terms of the argument that his persona, leadership, communication, and attitude were unprecedented in the history of American political leadership. California elementary educator, Kyle Redford (2016), wrote, "My students need to know that Trump's behavior is beyond historical precedent." Along similar lines, political science professors highlighted that Trump's new "political style [was] clearly outside the traditional boundaries of legitimate American values" (Knoll, 2016) and "the unprecedented dimensions of Trump's own politics represent a radical break from three of the basic commitments of the liberal tradition" (Blakely, 2016). Trump's radical rejection of political decorum led many educators to confront the anomaly of Trump leadership in a way they perceived to be at once protective and defensive—protective of students' safety and defensive of democracy. Underlying the unprecedented times frame was the conviction that students needed to know that Trump's leadership simply wasn't normal—that children should not feel personally victimized or threatened by the President. Educators concerned with defending historical precedent believe Trump's anti-democratic statements and actions were problematic because they did not uphold the values of democracy whereby all participants are regarded with respect and liberty; therefore, they felt that educators must stress the unprecedented nature of a leader who intentionally undermines the democratic standing of members of his own polity. If democratic values are to persist, these educators advocated using the Trump moment to delineate how Trump's historic defiance of democratic values contrasted widely-held nonpartisan democratic norms.

Danger to Democracy Frame

Alluded to elsewhere, the danger to democracy frame outlined a clear imperative for addressing Trump's anti-democratic messages with future participants. Johns Hopkins political science professor Daniel Schlozman said that, "Insofar as we think that our mission is to teach students how to be better citizens in a democratic republic, Trump raises questions that certainly in my lifetime nobody else has" (Diersing, 2016). The questions that Trump raises around democratic citizenship relate to the fundamental pedagogical questions Justice and Stanley (2016) raised about protecting "much cherished liberal values threatened by Trumpish demagoguery." By drawing attention to how values like liberty and equality are imperiled by manifestations of demagoguery, which appeal to people's basest prejudices, educators drew a connection between liberal values and the purpose of education as a safeguard against the corruption of democratic systems. I return to

high school social studies educator Scott Dolan's (2016) rejection of neutrality to reveal a different frame, "As educators, it would be unconscionable for us to remain neutral while our fundamental values are under attack. Neutrality would render us complicit in the destruction of our democracy." This time, Dolan's plea was a reminder that neutrality *on democracy* means that democracy gets steamrolled by majoritarian populism. According to these educators, democratic values and processes must be taught and cultivated in schools rather than glibly neglected under the guise of neutrality. When educators framed the Trump problem in terms of the threat he poses to democracy, they called attention to the fragility of the framework for democratic government. This frame reflected educators' belief that if they do not actively delineate and promote democratic values in classrooms, democracy itself could be in jeopardy.

Fear for the Future Frame

The third diagnostic frame, the future frame, reflected educators' concern about the future of self-government based on political equality. As Rhode Island middle school history educator Jonathan Gold (2016) wrote, "If our republic is as imperiled as it seems, the next generations of voters, leaders, activists, and politicians—our students—need to be taught how to take care of it. They need to learn to look out for one another, to promote justice and equality, and to debate and argue with rigor." Mitigating democratic peril meant focusing on future generations of citizens. Teaching Tolerance's Maureen Costello (2016) urged educators to address "future citizens so the next generation can carry on in that 'time we will not see' to model citizenship and to 'call American democracy back to its highest values.'" Concerned that today's students would internalize the anti-democratic rhetoric of the president, educators with benefit of middle age realized that "educators—K-12 and higher education—will remain at the vanguard of working against hate and gluing together the nation in the months and years to come" (Strauss, 2016 November). By expressing concern about what young Americans were internalizing about democratic government from Trump, these educators made the case for using classrooms to promote a democratic future.

As the above examples indicate, educators conceptualized the Trump problem and why it must be addressed in schools by referencing the past, present and future of American democracy. By looking back at the history of political decorum and presidential leadership, examining the present threat to democratic values, and protecting the future of civic knowledge, educators historicized the Trump problem in framing why educators should use classrooms to promote democratic education as a critical element of American political life.

The Prognostic Frame

The third section of this analysis identifies a prognostic frame wherein educators proposed solutions for American classrooms. This frame helps us understand how these educators conceptualized the answer to the Trump problem. It is comprised of three distinct sub-frames: the new curricula frame, the fact checking frame, and the critical media literacy frame. The new curricula frame highlights creative, often historical curricular approaches to promoting democracy. The fact checking frame promotes the use of online fact-checkers with students to analyze the veracity of online media, journalistic reports, and politicians' statements. The critical media literacy frame builds on the truth-finding mission by teaching students to be savvy consumers of media in an era of fake news. Taken together, these frames offer concrete strategies to promote non-partisan, pro-democratic ways of analyzing Trump's anti-democratic messages. Importantly, however, this framework can be applied to a broader range of issues regarding truth, media, and controversy in the classroom in the 21st century.

Not surprisingly, given the close relationship between diagnostic and prognostic frames, there was neat parallelism between diagnostic and prognostic frames throughout the educator discourse. Educators who framed Trump's leadership as historically unprecedented often advocated new curricular frameworks that drew on political history to make the point that there were templates for explaining anti-democratic populism. Educators who worried about the state of American democracy often embraced fact finding as a way to center truth in reclaiming democratic politics. Finally, many educators who were concerned about the future felt that the answer lay in educating critical media consumers who could transform the future of American democracy through political consciousness. What follows is a detailed analysis of each prognostic frame in the words of the educators who shared their strategies online with their peers.

New Curricula Frame

From high school humanities to graduate professional education, educators devised an array of revised and reinvented curricula for the Trump moment. For example, the Zinn Education Project, an online resource for teaching people's history, developed classroom lessons that foregrounded the role of social movements in affecting political change or that highlighted the history of 'divide and conquer' politics. Some political science professors abandoned their framework for teaching American partisanship as fundamentally anchored in shared liberal values and revised syllabi to re-center the history of fascist and totalitarian alternatives (Blakely, 2016). English educators worried that the canon didn't cut it and began,

retooling the reading lists and assignments they typically give their students. They worry that the classic high school canon doesn't sufficiently cover today's most pressing themes—questions about alienation and empathy and power—and that the usual writing prompts aren't enough to get students thinking deeper than an average cable news segment (Voght, 2017).

One international politics professor asked colleagues on Twitter how they adapted their coursework to Trump and "more than 150 people responded with answers that varied from changing the sources in the syllabus to starting a new class and teaching students about disinformation online" (Zimmerman, 2016). These educators inculpated existing curricula and frameworks as inadequate for ushering in the Trump moment by sanctioning narratives of unity with uncritical approaches to history. By framing the solution as new curricula, these educators probed *what* is taught and *how* it's taught to problematize America's electoral acceptance of Trump's anti-democratic stances. They made the case for centering democratic frameworks, values, and histories to limit disdain for democratic values in the next generation of citizens.

Fact Checking Frame

While new curricula required careful planning, the fact checking frame was used to promote an immediate way to engage with Trump's anti-democratic statements in the classroom. Educators of political science, social studies, and environmental studies all jumped at the importance of teaching students how to evaluate information. They advocated the use of tools like Politifact, FactCheck and the Washington Post's Fact Checker (Singer, 2017; Journell, 2017). New Jersey middle school educator Andy Butel (2018) wrote that educators "cannot be neutral about the misrepresentation of facts or the violation of norms of truth in public speech." Fact checking Trump's claims helped educators "assume the role that a healthy democracy relies upon them to play—helping their students to learn how to ground their own arguments in evidence and to ferret out the truth in others' arguments by assessing the degree to which they are supported by evidence" (Stopol, 2019). The search for evidentiary truth also helps deflect the perception of partisan

impropriety or political favoritism, as Hofstra University social studies Alan Singer (2017) wrote: “If one candidate comes across poorly when students fact-check their statements, that the candidate’s problem, nor ours as social studies educators.” Framing fact checking in the classroom as a solution to Trump’s anti-democratic statements reflects the commitment of educators of all disciplines to what Gutmann (1987) refers to as the democratic virtue of veracity.

Critical Media Literacy Frame

In writing about their responses to Trump, some educators turned to critical media literacy as a way to process Trump’s anti-democratic messages with students. The critical media literacy prognostic frame reflects high school English educator Andrea Rinard’s belief that “kids need to learn how to be more responsible and canny media consumers” to “navigate alternative facts and ad hominem attacks in the classroom” (Rinard, 2018). Citing predatory algorithms that feed confirmatory bias on social media platforms and search engines (Brighouse, 2018), some educators stressed the importance of media literacy in schools to produce truth-oriented consumers of information. High school English educator Andrea Rinard (2018) said, “We must teach our students how to conduct responsible, ethical means of inquiry” to “coax them out of the echo chambers” and decipher fake news (Rinard, 2018; Timsit, 2019). The media literacy prognostic frame has been buoyed by a wave of post-election state legislation that mandates media literacy in schools. Washington, California, New Mexico, and Rhode Island have all enshrined media literacy in education policy, while similar resolutions have been introduced in nine other states (Media Literacy Now, 2019). New legislation on critical media literacy links uncritical news consumption with the increasing reliance on unsubstantiated information in schools (SPLC, 2016). In the discourse I analyzed, many educators framed critical media literacy as ready-made solution for dealing with the anti-democratic messages of the president and combating the culture of “ad hominem” attacks that the president normalized during his campaign.

Conclusion

In February 2019 at a border wall rally in El Paso, Texas, Donald Trump Jr., the son of the 45th president, provoked young conservatives to disavow their educators: “You don’t have to be indoctrinated by these loser educators that are trying to sell you on socialism from birth. You don’t have to do it. Because you can think for yourselves. They can’t.” The educator discourse I have analyzed in this article strongly suggests that Trump Jr.’s malevolent characterization of educators is untrue. In fact, as I have shown, educators who chose to combat the president’s anti-democratic statements were working as critical professionals committed to democratic education above all else.

During Trump’s first term in office, some educators responded to Trump’s anti-democratic statements and actions by delineating and defending democratic norms. After considering the legal ramifications and their own positionality, as reflected in their writing, these educators decided to speak out against Trump’s anti-democratic statements and actions to uphold American democracy now and for the future. They were so moved by the problem—and the sheer strangeness of the times—that they took to the media to voice their professional opinions and engage others’. In constructing this online discourse, educators operated as a powerful democratic collective with the will to affect public discourse. In this case, these educators acted as regulators and whistleblowers with the intention of influencing public deliberation around the meaning of democracy. As homegrown assaults on democracy become increasingly common in the 21st century, negotiations around the meaning of democracy take on new urgency.

The frame analysis I have presented in this article has implications for how educators approach the 2020 election cycle as well as the controversial impeachment process. Educators concerned about the nature, quality and character of democratic education can use these lenses to consider how to tackle Trump era politics in their classrooms to center democratic education while avoiding the pitfalls of partisan perception à la Trump Jr. This article synthesizes the perspectives of secondary educators and university professors so that educators can understand the ways that other practitioners have interpreted the Trump problem. In addition, this article points to three concrete strategies for teaching history, social studies, English, political science and international relations in the precarious and shifting political climate: new historically-situated curricula that resonate in the current moment, fact checking as a politically responsive classroom activity, and critical media literacy for responsible knowledge consumption. This analysis opens up avenues for future research about how educators respond to the shifting geopolitical and economic conditions of the early 21st century as distinctive new forms of nationalism arise in democratic societies. It also suggests that there is a complex space between educator neutrality and democratic responsibility where adherence to the principles of democracy transcends partisan politics. Many of the statements and positions analyzed here, for example, could be seen as promoting an anti-government agenda simply by challenging the statements and actions of the sitting president. As I have shown, however, the aim of these educators was clear: to promote democracy by upholding its historical, legal, and ethical norms in American classrooms.

Hopefully this analysis can help policy makers and practitioners navigate the uncertain terrain of teaching during the Trump era by offering education professionals a framework for understanding the professional judgement of peer educators and reevaluating policies that encourage strict and decontextualized neutrality. This framework allows policymakers and educators to situate their politically charged reactions to the Trump era in terms of democratic responsibility. Using this framework, educators across disciplines, levels, and social contexts can reflect upon what motivates their reactions to Trump's messages: why are his messages a problem for educators and school leaders, and how can the ethos of his anti-democratic messages be confronted in the classroom without heaping on partisan perspectives? By reading about how other educators have framed the issue, individual educators struggling with the messy and complex questions of neutrality and disclosure can use the democratic lens to make sense of their reactions. I believe that this framework can help veteran educators struggling with shifting circumstances, new educators beginning their careers during these tumultuous times, university professors across disciplines, educators charged with advising the next generation of American educators, and policymakers charged with school culture make sense of shifting political conditions that challenge well-researched concepts like neutrality and disclosure (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Journell, 2016a, 2016b; Levinson, 2012).

The motivational, prognostic and diagnostic framework proves useful beyond academic analysis; using these framing creates another framework for professional judgement that helps educators deal with controversy in the classroom. In researching how to promote democratic education through teaching political controversy, Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy (2015) and Meira Levinson (2009) both offer frameworks for professional judgement; they are not prescriptions for how to approach controversy so much as guidelines for educators who want to model and uphold democratic norms and principles in their classrooms. This work adds to that literature by offering a window into how resisting President Trump's anti-democratic messages can be translated into professional judgement and self-reflective classroom policy in reactionary times.

As a high school early American history and international relations educator in the period leading up to the 2016 election, I struggled mightily with how to frame Trump in the classroom. Looking back, I realize that my desire to be seen by students as publicly resisting Trump's anti-

democratic statements could have been interpreted as anti-Trump, anti-Republican, or anti-right. The intense and stupefying nature of the 2016 election undermined my professional judgement and made me reactionary in ways that might have alienated some students or colleagues who supported Trump or the Republican party. Analyzing educators' writing in terms of frames helped me recalibrate and articulate my opposition to a newly-visible anti-democratic ideology embodied by Trump. With this framework, I was able to think more clearly about my own motives, how I understood the problem, and how I could solve it in the classroom in ways that are consistent with *supporting democracy*, not *opposing Trump*. Looking back, I worry that by simply *opposing Trump*, I unintentionally centered his vitriol and gave his anti-democratic messages credence by drawing students' attention to them. This analysis allowed me—and importantly, any educator, professor, policymaker, or school leader—the opportunity to parse out the defense of democracy that lies at the heart of my rejection of Trump's anti-democratic words and actions. Curriculum theorists, district leaders, instructional leaders, and educational policymakers can all benefit from understanding the frames that educators used to communicate a message of resistance to uphold democracy in American schools.

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