Examining Covert and Explicit Mechanisms of Education Inequity to Foster Just Public Education and Authentic Democracies: Special Issue Commentary

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Abstract: In this editorial essay, the author pinpoints key insights, implications, and cross cutting themes that emerged from this special issue. These insights shed light on the interlocking connection between inequitable public education systems and vulnerable democracies, both of which fail to uphold their charge to be inclusive and just. Special attention is given to the harm of race-avoidant, classist, and/or public-aversive discourse and policies, the coopting of equity-oriented agendas for private interests, political underrepresentation, and the multifaceted reach of global neoliberalism. All of these factors exacerbate racial and socioeconomic disparities in education and society. The author emphasizes how these and other dynamics amount to the provision of educational equity being constrained by dominant logics of fear, scarcity, and competition; the racialization and privatization of public education access; and ultimately, the operation of elitist versus truly representative democracies. She builds upon the volume's critical policy studies to stress the urgency

of countering both covert and explicitly biased educational policy mechanisms in order to improve public education and construct more authentic democratic societies.
Keywords: critical policy analysis; education policy; race; school choice; desegregation; funding; democracy

Examinando los mecanismos encubiertos y explícitos de la inequidad educativa para fomentar una educación pública justa y democracias auténticas: Editorial

Resumen: En este ensayo editorial, el autor señala ideas clave, implicaciones y temas transversales que surgieron de este número especial. Estas ideas arrojan luz sobre la conexión entrelazada entre los sistemas de educación pública inequitativos y las democracias vulnerables, que no logran cumplir su obligación de ser inclusivos y justos. Se presta especial atención al daño del discurso y las políticas que evitan la raza, el clasismo y/o la aversión al público, la cooptación de agendas orientadas a la equidad para intereses privados, la subrepresentación política y el alcance multifacético del neoliberalismo global. Todos estos factores exacerban las disparidades raciales y socioeconómicas en la educación y la sociedad. El autor enfatiza cómo estas y otras dinámicas se traducen en que la provisión de equidad educativa está restringida por lógicas dominantes de miedo, escasez y competencia; la racialización y privatización del acceso a la educación pública; y, en última instancia, el funcionamiento de las democracias elitistas frente a las verdaderamente representativas. Se basa en los estudios de políticas críticas del volumen para enfatizar la urgencia de contrarrestar los mecanismos de políticas educativas tanto encubiertos como explícitamente sesgados para mejorar la educación pública y construir sociedades democráticas más auténticas.
Palabras-clave: análisis crítico de políticas; política educativa; raza; elección de escuela; desegregación; fondos; democracia

Examinar mecanismos secretos e explícitos de desigualdade educacional para promover uma educação pública justa e democracias autênticas: Editorial

Resumo: Neste ensaio editorial, o autor aponta os principais insights, implicações e temas transversais que emergiram desta edição especial. Esses insights lançam luz sobre a conexão interligada entre sistemas de educação pública desiguais e democracias vulneráveis, que falham em defender sua responsabilidade de serem inclusivos e justos. Atenção especial é dada aos danos de discursos e políticas que evitam a raça, classistas e/ou aversivos ao público, a cooptação de agendas orientadas para a equidade para interesses privados, a sub-representação política e o alcance multifacetado do neoliberalismo global. Todos esses fatores exacerbam as disparidades raciais e socioeconômicas na educação e na sociedade. O autor enfatiza como essas e outras dinâmicas equivalem à provisão de equidade educacional sendo restringida por lógicas dominantes de medo, escassez e competição; a racialização e privatização do acesso à educação pública; e, finalmente, a operação de democracias elitistas versus democracias verdadeiramente representativas. Ela se baseia nos estudos críticos de política do volume para enfatizar a urgência de combater mecanismos de política educacional encobertos e explicitamente tendenciosos, a fim de melhorar a educação pública e construir sociedades democráticas mais autênticas.
Palavras-chave: análise crítica política; política educacional; raça; escolha da escola; desagregação; financiamento; democracia

Examining Covert and Explicit Mechanisms of Education Inequity to Foster Just Public Education and Authentic Democracies: Special Issue Commentary

True to the purpose of critical policy analysis (CPA), the articles in this special issue address a plethora of political, social, organizational, and cultural contexts to examine who is empowered or disempowered in the development and implementation of education policy (Diem et al., 2014; Horsford et al., 2019). Authors provide keen insight into how policy is a practice of power involving and affecting differently resourced sectors of the public (Levinson et al., 2009), be it students of color unwelcomed outside of their neighborhood school in the United States, African American families struggling to secure adequate early childhood education benefits for their children, or public school advocates in Australia and Canada facing setbacks in their attempt to stave off the increased public funding of private schools. The articles particularly reveal how privilege is leveraged from those with more financial resources, dominant social standing, white racial identity, and/or market-oriented ties—groups who disproportionately benefit not only from their relatively high membership on official decision-making bodies, but also from their heightened influence over political agenda setting in both official and informal deliberative spaces. Moreover, the studies convey how average citizens can easily lack the ability to persuade, or even access information about their elected or appointed representatives. Consequently, the authors work across Australia, Canada, and the US to reveal the urgency of improving vulnerable democracies along with public education systems.

Social justice-oriented scholars and educators tend to agree that high quality, inclusive, and equitable public schools are essential for preparing and empowering a citizenry that can nurture and improve a democracy (Brooks & Normore, 2010; Horsford et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2019). Yet, just as important, this volume illuminates how healthy democracies in which all citizens can equitably shape policymaking agendas, fairly reap public benefits, and act in the interest of the shared public good versus private enrichment, are essential for the protection and improvement of public schools.

This special issue further serves to compel us to critique and learn from the politics of omission. Fowler (2004) explains that public policy, in part, "includes a government's expressed intentions and official enactments as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity" (p. 9). Indeed, CPA helps to show that what is omitted from political agendas, mandates, and interventions can be even more revelatory of a society's or community's values—and more harmful to its people—than what is named and legislated. Together, the studies profiled in this volume show dangerous "inactivity" that avoids advancing equity, protecting public entitlements, and implementing corrective measures that combat systemic racism given, in part, the political clout of corporate interests, colorblind policymaking norms, and non-public supporting, upper income families.

The various research methodologies employed by the authors, joined with their common CPA objectives, also reveal an array of strategies, data sources, and theoretical frameworks we can use to constructively scrutinize status quo policymaking and then pinpoint better policy solutions. The articles particularly show the learning value of publicly accessible data stemming from public meetings, government websites, district surveys, policy and funding reports, podcasts, media articles, social media profiles, and other sources that authors regarded as policy texts. These texts revealed many public discourse, meaning making, and political engagement activities that the authors considered in light of critical theories of policy and discourse analyses, race, gender, funding allocation, and knowledge generation.

In the commentary below, I discuss insights and implications of each article while also noting the volume's cross cutting themes. Such themes pertain to how powerful factions especially

what Wang & Fikis (2019) refer to as "ad hoc publics" or unofficial coalitions—can dominate political discourse, and in turn fuel exclusionary agenda setting and reify the limited knowledge of policymakers. Findings further relate to the harm of race-avoidant and/or public-aversive policies, the coopting of equity-oriented agendas for private interests, funding inequity, and the multifaceted reach of neoliberalism— all of which exacerbate racial and socioeconomic disparities in education and society. These and other dynamics amount to the provision of educational equity being constrained by dominant logics of scarcity and competition, the racialization and privatization of quality public education space, and ultimately, the operation of elitist versus truly representative democracies. I build upon the wisdom of the articles to integrate additional implications for generating and enacting policies that support educational equity and justice.

Race, Segregation, and the Limits of Political Will

Racially segregated public schools were first legislated in the US in the 19th century (Anderson, 1989), yet almost 70 years after the desegregation of U.S. public schools was mandated, racial inequity remains deeply structured into school systems. Cultivating and maintaining the will of voters and policymakers to implement equitable measures that help rectify the racial stratification of schooling and educational outcomes remains a persistent challenge in the US. The Castro, Parry, and Siegel-Hawley study of school rezoning debates in Virginia and the Diem, Good, Smotherson, Walters, and Bonney study of school integration policies in three, major U.S. cities remind us how intersecting race and class factors—even when not explicitly named—continue to influence public ideology, discourse, and decision-making in ways that perpetuate school segregation. Indeed, the authors of both studies employed CPA and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to convey how policies largely materialize from the discourse, beliefs, and problem conceptualization of powerful public factions who promulgate ostensibly colorblind rationale and preferences that, in reality, have racially specific consequences.

Rezoning and 'Race-Neutral' Methods of Racial Exclusion

Castro et al. analyze a subsample of 3,339 public comments from residents of urban and suburban districts of Virginia to show, in part, how the majority of respondents perceived that rezoning schools in a way that integrated the majority Black, low socioeconomic (SES) student population of Richmond, VA schools into the more cultural and economically diverse Henrico County school system would constitute an unwanted, community disturbance. Residents mentioned seemingly reasonable concerns about logistical inconveniences, like wanting to maintain children's walkability to schools, and relational desires like wanting to maintain the social ties and connections of the students who would be moved out of their existing schools. Still, fears of "water[ing] down" the quality of predominantly white, well-resourced schools with the receivership of more students of color was implied throughout much of the discourse. The authors cite numerous incidents of upper-income parents issuing threats to district officials by way of stating their readiness to exit the district, attend private schools, and/or even sell their homes to maintain access to high performing (often predominantly white schools). Such a decision would mean them withdrawing their financial support of schools and towns if rezoning was implemented.

Without race being mentioned, respondents leveraged what research has shown to be racially coded discourse (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; powell, 2015[i])—discourse through which white and upper income people link integration measures with jeopardizing the "safety", "quality," and "caliber" of the resources they and their family enjoy. As Castro et al. astutely explained, many residents supported a "'race-neutral' method of racial exclusion" with anti-Blackness implications. This

amounted to powerful parents "exercis[ing] personal choice and economic power to 'buy-in' to certain neighborhoods and associated schools." In doing so, the residents leaned on their awareness of how policymakers value their social and fiscal capital to assert their private privilege within public deliberative and policymaking spaces. Residents also proliferated individualistic notions of achievement and meritocracy that the dominant, capitalistic culture of the U.S. fosters (De Lissovoy, 2018), versus connecting performance disparities to resource and opportunity gaps that are deeply structured into U.S. schooling and society (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Furthermore, they insinuated "that those most negatively impacted by inequity *cause* inequity" as Bertrand, Roger, and Perez (2015) have found to be a common trait of deficit-based policy discourse (p. 12).

Racial Equity Goals vs. the "Practiced Reality" of Resegregation

Like Castro et al., Diem and colleagues address "differences between policy rhetoric" that is colorblind "and practiced reality" that is racialized, particularly when it comes to policy practices that exacerbate social and racial stratification and inequities. They, like other authors in this volume, fulfill CPA's aim of considering the experiences, standpoints, and needs of marginalized populations who are routinely overlooked and underserved by policy officials, while explaining how power and resources are unfairly distributed (Diem et al., 2014; Horsford et al., 2019). Their study of three geographically diverse school district's racial integration and choice policies showed that race aversive discourse is not only a tactic of those opposing racial integration outcomes (such as in Castro et al.'s rezoning study), but they can be prominent amongst integration proponents as well, including school district leaders.

For instance, Diem et al. pointed to district officials' seemingly intentional use of "diversity" and "equity" language given these terms' broader meaning and increased palatability amongst white populations. Such discursive moves, however, can be counterproductive for policies like school and district integration initiatives that are specially designed to redress racial injustice. Indeed, the scholars' emphasized how the integration and choice plans of Metro Nashville, San Francisco, and St. Louis districts involve the retreat of mandatory, corrective measures and, instead, an overwhelming reliance on parents' and guardians' individualistic "choice logics" (Horsford et al., 2019). The ability of more resourceful, savvy, and informed parents to better access and navigate school choice arenas reinforces racial and class segregation, particularly because such parents are disproportionately white and/or upper income in diverse school districts (Cooper, 2007; Horsford et al., 2019). Consequently, the desegregation gains that were once secured via Metro Nashville's rezoning and reassignment efforts, San Francisco's court order, and St. Louis' historic voluntary integration plan are now waning, or are projected to wane, as structural interventions recede and market-oriented choice options escalate. Diem et al. recognize this is happening despite the hard work and progressive intent of many district officials over time.

Importantly, Diem et al.'s district-based school integration study also pointed to the interconnection of quality education and housing opportunities, which proved salient to the Castro et al. rezoning study too, given that U.S. students from lower-income families often cannot access school options outside of their residentially zoned area. Charter options too often present access barriers because they usually do not provide students with the free transportation that districts offer to traditional public school students, leaving critics like Metro Nashville district's vice chair to regard them as tools for 'government-funded white-flight.' As Diem et al. explained, seemingly benign school choices disproportionately benefit white students. At the same time, the authors remind us that most of the mandatory, systemic interventions that have sought to increase racial integration in schools, such as bussing, rezoning, and another reassignment and school reconfiguration policies, have been implemented in ways that typically burden students and families of color. It is also important to remember that contemporary school choice policies evolved from "freedom of choice"

policies originally designed in the 1950s for white parents to exit schools as a way of avoiding being part of the mandatory desegregation, so, their continued stratifying effects are not shocking (Wilson, 2014).

The phenomena that both Castro et al. and Diem et al. critique in their studies illustrate what Bonilla-Silva (2015), in his theorizing of colorblind racism, characterizes as "the increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices" and the "subtle" policy mechanisms that "reproduce racial privilege" (p. 1362). Their CPAs should move us to determine how not to place marginalized communities in lose-lose situations when it comes to participating in equity-oriented policy options. Such options, including those mandated by ostensibly colorblind policies, can be promoted and endorsed by progressive policymakers' working to activate points of interest convergence between people of color and white constituents. Yet, the interests of constituents who need protecting from systemic racism and the desires of constituents who may profess ideals of racial equality, but ultimately refuse to participate in racially conscious policy remedies, do not sufficiently intersect. This presents a political dilemma with which equity-driven policymakers must courageously confront.

Funding Private Education and Socioeconomic and Racial Stratification

While the leveraging of colorblind discourse to advance racially exclusive educational policy is a "covert mechanism" of inequity (Bertrand et al., 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2015), the public funding of private education is a clearly visible way of maintaining socioeconomic and racial-ethnic stratification. Both the Winton and Staples study of provincial school funding policies in Alberta, Canada and Sinclair's and Brooks' study of Australia's national school funding policies show how coalition groups explicitly strive for "discursive dominance" (Winton & Staples). Such coalitions then use that dominance to reshape political agenda setting in ways that serve their private interests rather than the public good.

Supporting Private Education Using "Story Lines" of Public Entitlement

Demonstrating how advocacy and opposition groups change their messaging and nuance their policy positions over time, Winston and Staples studied 30 years of data pertaining to the debate over publicly funding private schools in Alberta. They employ argumentative discourse analysis to explain how public groups construct and mobilize "story lines" as problem-centered political narratives to attract political support and policymaking traction. Like other authors in this volume, they provide important historical information to contextualize how education problems have been constructed and by whom, and they share the contested nature of proposed policy remedies. Winston and Staples particularly point to the influence of Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants who early on framed public access to any desired school that met government education standards as a matter of social justice, and thus worthy of public funding. The scholars show that this choice logic constructs the public funding of public, private secular, and private religious schools as the most inclusive option. The option, however, is inclusive of personal preferences versus of equitably distributed education access and opportunities. Such an individualistic framing of justice aligns with classical liberal arguments about equal liberties and freedom in the marketplace without accounting for power and resources imbalances (Horsford et al., 2019). This rationale, which Winton and Staples assert now drives neoliberal arguments, proved convincing in the greater public sphere and amongst Alberta's contemporary policymakers. Pro-private factions therefor secured increased public resources to fund private Alberta schools.

Winston and Staples assert a critical policy analytical stance that is economically grounded. We get from their work a clear view of the contrast between equating educational justice with minoritized and marginalized groups gaining freedom from oppressive and inferior schooling—a critical casting—and the neoliberal conception of educational justice that means unfettered market access and an ability to compete in the private sphere for economic gain and to assert a competitive edge domestically and globally. In Alberta, as in the US, neoliberal critics and many everyday parents who are skeptical of public schooling continue to cast public school systems as an encroaching "monopoly" they not only wish to resist, but also disempower. Winton and Staples, however, marshal data showing the sobering reality that the enactment of publicly funding private schools grants more advantage to upper income families who are already able to leverage their relative wealth in both public and private systems. The problem of socioeconomic inequity is therefore left unmitigated, with pro-public coalitions lacking effective public persuasion in the policymaking arena and the public education system being hindered by higher rates of public disinvestment.

"Guaranteeing Unequal Representation" in Decision Making about Funding Equity

The influence of government-backed, private coalitions, and the conflicts of interest such support involves, is compellingly demonstrated in the Sinclair and Brooks study. These authors' examination of Australia's national debate over redistributed school funding highlights how powerful Catholic and private independent school officials thwarted the passage of the Australian Labour Party's (ALP) proposed initiative for equitable funding reform. Like Canada, Australia is a Commonwealth territory of the United Kingdom and is considered both a representative democracy (like the US), yet also a constitutional monarchy.

Sinclair and Brooks explained how Australia's nationally governed education system has not been significantly altered in nearly 50 years, which has perpetuated a status quo that disadvantages economically, racially, and linguistically minoritized groups despite the nationally proclaimed commitment to 'education equity and excellence.' They describe how the 2010 comprehensive review of national funding policy was steered by "an eminent businessman, and philanthropist," and reviewed by officials with ties to elite independent schools, which invited the influence of strong corporate and private schooling without concern about how that would likely direct support away from increasing public school funding. Ultimately, the independent school sector which serves just 14% of Australia's school system wielded an extremely disproportionate influence over media, the organizing of events that solicited public feedback, and ultimately, the policy outcome that blocked redistributed funding. Consequently, the national system that generously subsidizes private schools was maintained.

In the Australia study, we see how the government was complicit in fueling the ideas that their policymaking process was 'sector neutral' and fairly representative of public schooling interests, rather than biased. Both public and private elites, as the authors assert, were therefore part of "guaranteeing unequal representation in the process." Specifically, public officials helped mask the patriarchal, classist, and racist implications of a political process managed by white, elite, male, profit-oriented powerholders. Powerholders who, as indicated by the data, were motivated by their desire to hoard rather than share resources and privilege. Moreover, data suggested that these elites attempted to co-opt appeals to public fairness and cast themselves as the disadvantaged subjects of "class warfare," rather than perpetuators of socioeconomic and educational opportunity disparities. This dynamic resonates with some of the argumentation of the resistors of rezoning and integration interventions in the Castro et al. and Diem et al. U.S.-based studies.

Sinclair and Brooks importantly acknowledge that Australia's funding debate occurred within the nation's distinct colonial contexts, and in a way that excluded its Indigenous/ Aboriginal populations from the political deliberative sphere. Indeed, the Australian study, like the others in this

volume, provide the sobering reminder that democracies do not easily spur equity, rather as Patel (2014) asserts, democracies maintain colonial, neoliberal, and/or individualistic processes through which not everyone has access to speak, influence, or be protected. The type of biased and non-representative political processes illustrated in the Sinclair and Brooks study further shows how elite powerholders can engage in a form of "adaptive discrimination" that Hollett and Frankenberg consider in their study of early childhood education (ECE) funding policies. Within Australia's context, powerholders devised and continually adapted ways to discriminate against public education advocates by blocking their political engagement.

Funding and "Adaptive Discrimination" in the Early Childhood Education Marketplace

While the Canadian and Australian studies profile coalitions that unapologetically siphon funding from public schools, Hollett and Frankenberg unveil how even the public funding of seemingly compensatory policies crafted with equity-oriented intensions can perpetuate class and racial inequities. The authors leverage their CPA to pinpoint how Black and Latinx children are systematically disadvantaged in the ECE arena. In doing so, they examine an often invisibilized sector of education to reveal inequities experienced by families who are overlooked in the majority of education research—namely, families impacted by poverty who are seeking educational opportunities at pre-kindergarten levels.

Hollett and Frankenberg draw upon Elise Boddie's theory of adaptive discrimination to demonstrate how "racial discrimination is dynamic and regenerative," and powerholders can continually alter policies and expectations to erect barriers to educational access. Key to the authors' analysis is their offering of historical context regarding the racialization of social welfare policy provisions and refusals. In the US, this has been largely tied to the stereotyping and unjust criminalizing of Black families, particularly Black mothers, to project them as morally inferior and undeserving compared to white families experiencing poverty. Hence, policymakers have historically constructed a type of narrative (or "story line") that is steeped in the intersection of racist and classist bias that unfairly penalizes Black families, children, and communities with policy restrictions. The disenfranchising effects of such restrictions, ironically, structurally incentivized the fractured family structures and single mother dependency that many castigate (Cooper & McCoy, 2009).

When considering how a legacy of discriminatory social welfare policies affect families of color now, Hollett and Frankenberg found that tiered subsidies result in Black and Latinx families with higher levels of poverty not being able to access higher ranked ECE programs, thus their children disproportionately attend lower rated facilities and have less qualified educators compared to white families. This is so because when families choose facilities that state officials deem to be of higher quality, they are eligible to receive higher subsidies; yet, those facilities are still more expensive and more affordable for white families overall. The authors leverage innovative methods, particularly quantitative critical race theory (QuantCrit) to interrogate how state officials define and measure school "quality" in ways that may be inefficient and not culturally responsive.

Complicating things further, the authors explain that child care providers who accept high levels of families with subsidies often struggle in being able to afford to make the improvements necessary to secure a higher state ranking, such as upgrading facilities and paying higher rates to more qualified teachers. This is particularly so for Black-owned, home-based caregivers whom Black families most often choose and are most able to access. A seemingly progressive policy therefore reinforces—perhaps inadvertently—racial segregation patterns that are linked to concentrated poverty and a history the politics of containment that is raced, classed, and gendered (Cooper & McCoy, 2009). Indeed, Hollett and Frankenberg found that the ECE access "gap between Black and White children widened from 2014 to 2019," and that while half of Pennsylvania's ECE subsidy

recipients are Black, the state system ultimately maintains better choice options for white families, just as the district policies do in the Castro et al. and Diem et al. studies when considering segregation and K-12 schooling contexts.

The tiered funding approach, while ostensibly calibrated in a reasonable way, is still not equitable. As shown in the Australian and Canadian education funding studies, publicly funding private schooling options leaves the families most economically and socially marginalized as the most disadvantaged in the marketplace if policymakers do not explicitly provide them the most benefits.

True to CPA goals of recommending how policymakers can be held more accountable to equitably serving those most structurally disenfranchised (Diem et al., 2014; Horsford et al., 2019), Hollett and Frankenberg propose several recommendations for revamping the ECE funding system and very importantly stress the urgency of implementing improved policies given how the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the ECE sector and placed poor families in deeper crises. Ultimately, their work also links to the significance of understanding how policymakers' faulty assumptions about families' school choice-making, and stereotypical ideas about families of color, can result in developing policies that embed inadequately constructed concepts and insufficient measurement of schooling conditions that then lead to inequitable policy impact.

The Dangers of Inadequate Representation That Maintains "Blind Spots" at the State Level

Van Gronigen, Young, and Rodriguez contribute to the volume's attention to important matters of inclusion, exclusion, and democratic representativeness by asking 'Who governs?' at the state level, which is the most powerful and consequential education policy sector in the US. By studying state boards of education (SBOE) specifically, the authors examine a political body that is under researched to gauge how their composition reflects the diversity of the populations they serve given a range of gender, racial-ethnic, age, political party affiliation, and professional background factors. As the authors state, 'the deliberative nature of government requires the presence of individuals who have direct access to or can speak from historically excluded perspectives'; and at the same time, policymaking bodies should shift over time to represent a changing demographics. Their work aligns with Horsford et al.'s (2019) contention that the 'public' in public education requires not only to public funding, but also a political system that is "transparent and accountable to the public and works to foster a democratic public sphere and a common good," (p. 166). This also includes "authentic participation" whereby constituents can access governance and the shaping of equitable and socially responsive.

While the volume's other studies reveal numerous discursive and structural barriers that both private coalitions and public officials erect to squelch fair public access, Van Gronigen et al. employ CPA in a way that reflect the ideal of healthy democracies being diverse, inclusive, and dynamic—something only two U.S. states explicitly work towards based on their SBOE composition regulations. The authors' examination of SBOEs also reveal strong indicators of dominant political values and slow shifting pillars of power that are evident given who is steadily vested with the charge to govern. For instance, on the surface, women are proportionately represented when only considering sex, yet not so when factoring their racial-ethnic (and likely religious, sexual orientation, class, and ability) identities.

The population sector most clearly represented from the publicly accessible data Van Gronigen et al. analyzed is the corporate rather than professional education sector. With only seven states having a designated seat for a public school educator, and at least 13 states actually banning

public educators from serving on their SBOE, the authors indicate how the state system privileges individualized knowledge and corporate interests rather than prioritizing public education expertise and advocacy. For example, they found that business executives are represented on SBOEs at almost twice the rate as educators. With regard to SBOE members overall, the authors determined that "some appeared to have little to no access to perspectives from the current education system." Such lack of professional expertise in another high stakes policy sector—like public health policymaking bodies having low representation from medical professionals—would surely be deemed as inappropriate. The fact that this disturbing reality is widely accepted and perpetuated in public education undermines the growth of better quality, more equitable public schooling. It also invites the continued influence of neoliberal agendas.

Van Gronigen et al.'s use of diffractive methods further points to the idea that for a representative democracy to be effective, information flow and knowledge production must by multidirectional. All populations segments should be able to access factual, timely information about public officials and policies, and those officials should actively seek and learn from multiple perspectives stemming from their diverse constituents and the trained, practicing experts charged with implementing state policies. Without the latter, policymakers nurture an "echo chamber effect" (Wang & Fikis, 2019, p. 670) whereby they primarily exchange information with those with similar backgrounds, ideologies, and interests. Indeed, research has shown that political elites typically dialogue and learn most from other elites which often reifies deficit-based conceptions of those less fortunate and systemically disempowered (Bertrand et al., 2015). They also retain the type of "blank spots" of unknowing and the "blind spots" of inadequately understanding people, problems, and outcomes that Van Gronigen et al. discuss. This all diminishes their capacity to fulfill the promise of representative governance, a dynamic that—as the authors note—consistently hurts historically minoritized and marginalized populations.

Conclusion

The authors featured in this volume share profound and highly contextualized content about the local, regional, and national factions competing for educational resources and political influence. In doing so, they provide nuanced analyses of an array of inequities in public education, from long persistent fissures of racial injustice, segregation, and political underrepresentation to ever changing discursive conflicts and the evolving instantiations of the elitist factions who are mobilizing to satiate private schooling interests. Together, the authors' work offers sharp snapshots of the discriminatory and privatization forces impeding public education on a global scale while shedding light on the complexities of democratic systems. They illuminate "dominant assumptions about whose voices should and should not count in education policy" (Van Gronigen et al.) thereby demonstrating that education policies not only function as "texts of production, representation, and consumption," (Castro et al.), but also as texts of reproduction. Reproduction occurs by policies proliferating racial and privilege via covert or explicitly biased mechanisms.

The Castro et al. and Diem et al. studies carry profound implications for how inequitable educational access, inadequate choice policies, and the racialization of space by white and/or middle- and upper-income families who invoke what Castro et al. refer to as "a white spatial imaginary or frame" in policy discourse. This frame imagines and projects people of color in deficit-based stereotypical ways, thus demeaning groups' intelligence, morality, relatability, goodness, and humanity. Such racialized spatial imaginaries, as Nickson asserts (forthcoming), "have created hegemonic ideologies that affect how we interact with place and space," and they influence one's "embodied action." Within education policy contexts, such action embodies racial and class

oppression whereby quality education provided in both the private and public sphere is deemed a private good to be most thoroughly enjoyed by predominantly white communities who can successfully compete in the marketplace and persuade policymakers. People of color are therefore twistedly constructed as spatial interlopers who infringe upon the liberties of white families seeking access to what they perceive as the best schools. According to De Lissovoy (2008), such distorted ideations can occur when the capitalistic and white supremacist dynamics of colonialism combine to project dominant groups as more "virtuous" and more worthy of public provision than others. This aligns with part of Hollett's and Frankenberg's funding critique of equitably-framed, ECE redistributive policy measures.

The projection of classist imaginaries (which can intersect with racial imaginaries) are also evident in the school funding studies of Winton and Staples and Brooks and Sinclair. The lesser income, public school-attending Albertans and Australians were, respectively, deemed as a threat to affluent coalitions striving to maintain the competitive advantage of their children and private school students. Indeed, across the volume's the two segregation and three funding studies, the logics of racial and/or class competition, proprietariness, and entitlement that global neoliberalism spurs are pervasive.

Overall, this volume conveys the value of educators, policymakers, and everyday citizens embracing what Brooks & Normore (2010) describe as a "glocal perspective." This entails understanding how local, national, and global dynamics and conditions are interactive and mutually influential, and thus, affect schools, educational politics, political engagement, and policy outcomes at every level. To advance equity and education justice, policymakers and educational leaders must better inform themselves of the knowledge, strengths, experience, and needs of people of color and those economically disenfranchised so they avoid succumbing to deficit-based ideologies and the development of ill-conceived politics that promote division, commodification, and ultimately weaken public education and democratic societies as a whole. The studies reveal sobering and disturbing truths, yet truths amassed from evidence-based knowledge we can draw from to more precisely understand what to oppose and dismantle.

As of this writing, the global COVID-19 pandemic persists, making public education more vulnerable than ever given dire staffing and material resource shortages, along with the impaired physical, mental, and social wellbeing of educators, schoolchildren, and families. Hopes lies in policymakers, educational leaders, families, and community members at every level coalescing to share resources, counter oppressive dominance, and reinvest in public education for the greater good. Even amidst such challenging times, we have the opportunity to forge stronger, anti-racist and class inclusive alliances, be more creative about leveraging our collective strength, and embrace communal caretaking norms that take advantage our interdependence and nurture our mutual wellbeing.

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Notes

[i] john a. powell does not capitalize his name.

[ii] This paper's author, C.M. Wilson, published as C.W. Cooper prior to 2009.